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Devils to Ourselves

An analysis of the humanistic pessimism that links Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde to Shakespeare's Troilus and Cressida as well as Romeo and Juliet

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**Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the
Prerequisite for Honors
in English Literature
under the advisement of Cord Whitaker**

April 2017

2017 Juliette Mann

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For D.R.M.

I would like to acknowledge the work of my advisor, Professor Cord J. Whitaker, and thank him for his tireless work on my behalf. Without his advice and direction, this work would not exist.

Thank you as well, to Professor Yu Jin Ko and Professor William Cain, for their comments which ultimately helped shape my final draft. Thank you once more to Professor Ko for first introducing me to Troilus and Cressida, and to my Oxford tutor, Laura Ashe, for the endless inspiration.

Although Chaucer and Shakespeare lived and wrote roughly 200 years apart, they both managed to produce works that set the precedent for tragedy and romance. Respectively, they became lauded as the greatest poet and playwright of their times. Chaucer became known as the “father of English Poetry” and our “English Homer,” and Shakespeare alone has contributed more than 1700 words to the English language. In regards to their depth and influence, the two authors resemble each other more closely than they resemble any other poets or playwrights in English Literature (Thompson, 1978). Accordingly, they have been awarded their due by an overwhelming number of critics. It is to be expected that two writers of comparable fame would be put into conversation with each other.

This trend was evident even during Shakespeare’s own time: his contemporary Ben Jonson notes that Shakespeare was extremely interested in medieval writers, Geoffrey Chaucer in particular (Jacobs and White, 2015). However, much critical analysis comparing the authors has been concerned with merely proving that Shakespeare read Chaucer, and all too often this has been limited to the more easily proven and more widely accepted comparison of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen* to *The Knight’s Tale*. A smaller selection of critics, Coghill, Donaldson, and Thompson notably, have focused specifically on Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde* as well as Shakespeare’s *Troilus and Cressida* and *Romeo and Juliet*. Donaldson himself calls for a lengthening of what he refers to as Thompson’s “groundbreaking” work proving correlation between Chaucer and Shakespeare (Donaldson, 1985). However, the problem remains that a strategy of analysis that relies too heavily on proving correlation tends to ignore larger implications of causation. Thus, it is important to give even further attention to the authors’ choices in development and, in the case of *Troilus and Cressida*, the specific changes Shakespeare made to Chaucer’s own adaptation.

In beginning to comprehend the influence Chaucer may have had on Shakespeare, it is important to understand the context of their works in regards to their respective changing social and cultural worlds, especially as they pertain to religious uncertainty. In her book *Poetic Freedom and Poetic Truth: Chaucer, Shakespeare, Marlowe, Milton*, Harriet Hawkins compares Chaucer and Shakespeare by writing that they both “embody in poetry the truth as they knew it” (Hawkins, 1976). Yet, Chaucer and Shakespeare lived and wrote in two entirely different times, and thus may have entirely different “truths.” Ann Thompson compares *Troilus and Criseyde* to *Troilus and Cressida* by arguing that they were both writing for “Christian audiences, which ought in theory to have condemned as excessive the value placed by the protagonists upon earthly felicity, and this can still be seen as a moral problem today, though the lovers would be accused of self-indulgence rather than blasphemy” (Thompson, 1978). Her point cannot be denied, that both Chaucer and Shakespeare’s England centered around the church and a religious way of life. Helen Cooper claims that “For Chaucer, Christianity was a given, and faith was effectively the only option available” (Cooper, 2010). She goes on to emphasize the importance faith to Chaucer’s time, describing how faith was the medium in which he and his society lived and worked. Most people would never have seen a picture or a sculpture that was not religious in subject (Cooper, 2010). Shakespeare’s era, although much later than Chaucer’s, experienced similar overwhelming religious presence. As the country departed from a period of being almost entirely Roman Catholic, the shift to Protestantism conveyed even more thoroughly the importance of faith as schools taught the favored religion and blasphemy was punishable by death (Cooper, 2010).

Although their audiences were largely Christian, it is important to note that England, for the majority of both authors’ lives, underwent a revolution of religious beliefs, gender roles, and

political authority. Such a tumultuous environment leads us to consider that Shakespeare's audience may have perceived allusions to any such topic in a very different way than Chaucer's audience would have, possibly affecting Shakespeare's approach to the same story and characters. For Shakespeare in particular, the socio-political environment was a tumultuous one; Catholicism was replaced with Protestantism to the point where churches were remodeled and severe punishment inflicted for heresy. Beatrice Groves writes that "The world of the play reflects the world in which it was first performed, and with the destruction of the panoply of Catholicism, rituals become fractured and fragmentary" (Groves, 2006). Thus, an examination of Shakespeare's work may reveal new form, ideas, and practices coming forth at a time when literary tradition was in flux. It is also possible that a time period with so many competing religions would have led Shakespeare to question the notion of organized religion altogether (Shreyer, 2014). Groves goes so far as to define his time as one of "religious obsessions and uncertainties" (Groves, 2007). However, an interpretation of Shakespeare as "questioning religion" is complicated by evidence of political censorship, making it difficult to define religious sentiment in any of Shakespeare's plays. Michael Hays notes that Shakespeare was "writing in circumstances partly conditioned by playhouse censorship and royal patronage, he would be careful and incremental in anything which we might regard as advances on contemporary thought" (Hays and Matthews, 2005). It is not surprising, therefore, to find traditional religious notions or even Catholic ideals within the playwright's work, but it is difficult to discern what he may have left out, and what is present does not lend itself to clear interpretation. Thus, an already complex tactic of analysis, that of the consideration of historical context, becomes even more difficult. What is interesting in the study of Shakespeare is not

whether he was Catholic or Protestant, but how religion is addressed in his work, and how religious focus has shifted since earlier times.

Chaucer too faced times of religious uncertainty, adding a layer of depth to what some consider to be his most principled work. Thompson notes, “Chaucer was a much more solemn, intellectual figure for the Elizabethans than he is in the popular mind today. He was often described as a ‘moral writer.’ The poem most frequently singled out for praise was ‘Troilus and Criseyde,’ which was admired for its ‘classical’ setting, its formal ambitiousness, and, of course, its sententiousness” (Thompson, 1978). Yet, it is difficult to discern the exact intent of Chaucer’s ‘sententiousness’. The religious uncertainty of Chaucer’s day differs greatly from Shakespeare’s and was much more centered upon the recognition of corruption within the office of the church (Schreyer, 2014). During his lifetime, there were two rival popes: one in Rome and one in Avignon. Such a faith centered society was shaken by the challenge to the truth of their religion (Cooper, 2010). Although it is easy to examine Chaucer’s poem as purely Christian and sententious, especially the final book, to do so would be to ignore Chaucer’s excellent political and religious satire that is especially prevalent in *The Canterbury Tales*. As we see evidence of political satire in a time when the throne of England itself was in turmoil (Benson, 1992), we must question the intent of an author who uses his writing to highlight the corruption of his times as well as to teach a Christian moral, not only in terms of his readers, but his own beliefs. We are led to examine religion, not only as a centric moral guideline, but as a social construct. Although it is difficult to analyze each author’s religious commentary separately, when we put their works into conversation with each other, it is possible to find new meaning through Shakespeare’s choices to maintain or adapt Chaucer’s work.

While it is possible to simply analyze each author in terms of his respective literary, political, and religious culture, the fact that they each chose to write, and consequentially create their own unique version of the classic story of Troilus and Cressid, allows us to compare more than simply the author's words, but their inspiration, process, themes, and ultimate morals. As a major source of inspiration for Shakespeare's work, it is tempting for readers of Shakespeare to simply label Chaucer as a source. However, the texts come together and diverge with such remarkable frequency, that, as Spens notes in "An Essay on Shakespeare's Engagement with Tradition," "...in every case [Shakespeare] makes some change that, though superficially slight, is really like a shifting of the centre of gravity and alters the meaning of every speech. He says 'a far other thing in the same words,' and the thing he says is sometimes not merely different but a direct denial of the older thought" (Spens, 1972). By examining the choices that Shakespeare makes in terms of moral redemption and the character development of Troilus and of Cressida, both where they agree with and deviate from Chaucer, my study aims to add depth to scholarly understanding of and engagement with both authors' works. Accordingly, questioning how Chaucer chooses to frame his romance in terms of religious salvation reveals more about Shakespeare as a critical reader attempting to come to terms with the religious state of his social and cultural world.

A story that undergoes such a thorough and dark transformation as that of Chaucer's *Troilus and Cressyde* to Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* begs further investigation by its audience. As we examine the connotation of Shakespeare's choices where they correspond with or take new directions from Chaucer's work, we are also able to further divulge contextual meaning from Chaucer's poem. As the final message the reader is left with, the difference between the ultimate endings of the poem and the play are the easiest to trace distinct differences

between. While Chaucer's Troilus is elevated through knowledge of the divine and granted enough of a view of humanistic life to understand its insignificance and laugh with mirth, Shakespeare's Troilus is swallowed by the war which consumes the play. Despite the fact that, as Shakespeare critic David McInnis notes, "Chaucer's poem is overwhelmingly cited as Shakespeare's chief source for the love story," (McInnis, 2008), the play in actuality features a dark departure from Chaucer's sententious religious themes. Although the poem and the play appear to be rooted in romance, Chaucer's Troilus' religious allusions and Boethian musings hint at a deeper meaning. Yet, when we compare this Troilus to that of Shakespeare's imagining, a much more troubled and deeply selfish Troilus emerges. As the play unfolds, any element of hope which Chaucer's moral portends is consumed in the dark, corrupt world of Shakespeare's Troy, leaving the reader with no hope of redemption, and an absence of religious moral altogether.

The characters of Criseyde and Cressida tell us more about the world of Chaucer and Shakespeare's imagining, as well as the audiences for whom they were writing. In his criticism *The Swan at the Well: Shakespeare Reading Chaucer*, E. Talbot Donaldson claims that "Criseyde's or Cressida's behavior with Troilus has always been, in the long run, indefensible" (Donaldson, 1985). This is mainly supported, not, as one would believe, by Chaucer's work, but by the portrayal of the leper Cresseid by Henryson's *The Testament of Cresseid*, which was printed directly following Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* in many editions and with which Shakespeare would have been well acquainted (Thompson, 1978). However, while it is tempting to merely paint Criseyde and Cressida as morally reprehensible, our authors take great care to add depth and complexity to their heroines. Chaucer's Criseyde is a far cry from the one dimensional female of Bocaccio's invention, and Shakespeare's Cressida appears so aware of

both her situation and the consequences of her actions as to make the audience question whether she was really at fault. Still, when we compare the two heroines, it is clear that the two authors' portrayals have entirely different effects. In terms of plot, both characters choose their current, temporal happiness over a possible future happiness with Troilus. Yet, Chaucer's larger, religious moral implies that Criseyde's decision is comparable to the choice between earthly happiness over heavenly eternity, whereas in the context of Shakespeare's corrupt and redemption-less setting, Cressida's betrayal is exactly what we would expect from such a world. In order to relay this message, Shakespeare takes care to also add depth and complexity to his Troilus. Although subtle, Troilus' early doubt in Cressida, his rush to leave her after their night together, and the ease with which he gives her up can be interpreted as human flaw. It is possible to argue that Cressida realizes full well that, to Troilus, women are simply "angels wooing"; reason enough for her to leave him. In comparison, Chaucer's Troilus' major flaw is that he places heavenly devotion in a human woman, and suffers accordingly. Chaucer's narrator does not fail to place the blame on Criseyde's human, fickle love, even going so far as to apologize for "giving women a bad name" (Coghill, 1971). Ultimately, Troilus is offered redemption while Criseyde is left to embody falsehood and earthly corruption. The differing levels of blame which Chaucer and Shakespeare attribute to their heroines shapes their ultimate moral messages: while Chaucer's Criseyde serves as a sharp contrast to heavenly redemption, Shakespeare's Cressida becomes yet another piece of the corrupt world in which both she and Troilus are left to suffer. Chaucer's moral message reflects an emphasis upon heavenly devotion, while Shakespeare's illustrates a disillusionment with society at large.

Initially, the connection between *Romeo and Juliet* and *Troilus and Cressida* is more ambiguous. The two plays were written in very different times of the playwright's life: *Romeo*

and Juliet was written at the beginning of his career, while *Troilus and Cressida* was written within a series of Shakespeare's greatest and most renowned tragedies, including *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, and *King Lear*. Without necessarily engaging in biographical criticism, being aware of the difference in timing of these plays helps us to understand the differences in their overall messages. Although they both contain tragic elements, it is possible to argue that *Romeo and Juliet* contains a message of redemption, both in the quality of love that the two lovers leave behind and in the hope for their families. In contrast, *Troilus and Cressida* obliterates any and all examples of love, friendship, and even honor, blaming the corruption of the world and flaws of human circumstance. Just as Chaucer toys with notions of fate, and, accordingly, Christian morality, *Romeo and Juliet* becomes a tragedy of fate, leaving the world still fundamentally good and capable of offering hope. Yet, where *Romeo and Juliet* is perfectly poised to offer a Christian moral, especially with the presence of the Friar and overwhelming themes of death and love, so similar to the *Troilus and Criseyde*'s, Shakespeare's work offers a departure from Chaucer's clear religious allusion. Notions of religious salvation which pervade Chaucer's work are present only in the form of hope and belief in love in parallel scenes within *Romeo and Juliet*, and are entirely absent within *Troilus and Cressida*, indicating a shift, not only in Shakespeare's writing, but in the way he read Chaucer during his lifetime and the creation of these two plays.

I intend to first examine, in Chapter 1, *Troilus and Cressida* in comparison to *Troilus and Criseyde* in order to establish a connection between the two in terms of religious allusions and notions of salvation. I will then analyze, in Chapter 2, the characters of Cressida and Criseyde to determine how the portrayal of these two heroines supports a reading of Shakespeare as departing from Chaucer's themes of redemption. Finally, I will examine both *Troilus and*

Criseyde, in Chapter 3, and *Triolus and Cressida*, in Chapter 4, in comparison to *Romeo and Juliet* in order to analyze what possible inspiration Shakespeare may have found in Chaucer's work and how his reading of the early author may have changed throughout his lifetime.

Chapter 1: Troilus and Troilus

An examination of the flawed nature of Chaucer's and Shakespeare's respective heroes

Both Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* as well as Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* refuse to be confined by generic boundaries. Chaucer, whose satire would come to define *The Canterbury Tales*, uses humor to ease the melodramatic effect of his heroes' love. He writes an epic translation, pushing the boundaries of tragedy and romance as defined by medieval times (Barney, 1992). This is evident in his final book, in which Troilus is granted a glimpse of eternity.

And laughed within him at the woe of those
Who wept his death so busily and fast,
Condemning everything we do that flows
From blind desire, which can never last,
When all our thought on Heaven should be cast; (Coghill, 1971)

Troilus is finally able to see the triviality of his humanly suffering. He is offered a divine answer, a universal truth, and his response is mirth. We are introduced to an element of "divine comedy," as the "tragedy of earthly death transforms into the comedy of heavenly vision" (Pugh, 2005). The love story takes on new meaning; while tragic, it also offers hope of redemption. Chaucer chooses to root his story in a Christian moral. Shakespeare too introduces conflicting themes to the age-old story. Often referred to as a "problem play" (Bevington, 2001), *Troilus and Cressida* defies classification as a tragedy, history, or comedy. The well-known story of war-time romance is tragic in its portrayal of failed love and the pointless scruples of war, yet comedic in the personification of its characters. By deftly weaving aspects of all three genres, *Cressida* implies that the playwright's meaning is too multifaceted to be conveyed by a single genre. Yet, what *Cressida* is missing makes this "poem to play" comparison all the more fascinating; the concept of divine justification is clearly removed from Shakespeare's interpretation. While it is possible

that Troilus' heavenly vision would be impossible to stage, as such an ascent is not to be seen in any of Shakespeare's works, it is the absence of any sort of heavenly justification within the play that raises the most questions. By breaking the "boundaries" set by his predecessor, Shakespeare's ending leaves his readers without hope, not just for humankind, but for any sort of redemption.

At their premises, Chaucer's and Shakespeare's stories are fundamentally love stories; both stories begin with Troilus' love. However, both authors begin this classic plot by also adding an element of tension; there is a quality to Troilus' love that will ultimately lead to his undoing. One aspect of Chaucer's portrayal is the tone of a typical medieval romance. Jenni Nuttal, in her guide to *Troilus and Criseyde*, prefers to think of this element as that of "the art of love," in which, for example, "the lover makes extravagant pledges of devotion to his lady and considers her beauty and manners to be beyond compare" (Nuttal, 2012). However, Thompson warns against a mode of criticism which implies that "Chaucer was unaware of any conflict between 'courtly love' and 'Christian marriage'" (Thompson, 1978). Even Nuttal admits that such a style "was not a unified code observed by all... [literary] medieval lovers... the art of love is both accepted and challenged in Troilus" (Nuttal, 2012). As Troilus pines after Criseyde in the typical manner of courtly love, Chaucer introduces his first challenge. The narrator adds an element of the divine to the story in their first mention of Criseyde.

So angelic was her native beauty,
that like a thing immortal seemed she,
as does a heavenly and perfect creature
sent down here to put shame to our nature. (Coghill, 1971)

Using diction such as "angelic" and "immortal," the narrator paints a heavenly, unearthly image. However, they also make a firm distinction between Criseyde and a divine creature through the use of "seemed." Criseyde may be beautiful, but she is still human. The narrator seems to be

giving a warning: in the juxtaposition between the heavenly and the earthly, the divine are clearly in the right because they “put shame to our nature.” There is an element of divine interference and, eventually, justice that will redefine the love story.

The comparison between the mortal and the divine becomes a key aspect of Troilus’ love for Criseyde. Within Book 3, just as the two are about to consummate their love, Troilus’ words echo another famous literary source. In his article, “Reading about Lancelot in Chaucer’s Troilus and Criseyde,” Brother Anthony of Taizé notes, “...this stanza includes a series of echoes from the highest spiritual climax of Dante’s *Commedia*, the prayer addressed to the virgin Mary by St. Bernard in *Paradiso* 33.13-21: ‘Donna, se’ tanto grande e tanto vali...’ (Brother Anthony, 2003). In making such a literary choice, Chaucer introduces a number of conflicts: the pagan Troilus uses Christian words, he substitutes human love for divine love, and he does so at an erotic, and decidedly unchristian, moment. To see further elements of Christianity within *Troilus and Criseyde*, one need look no further than Book Five, in which Mary is referred to as “maid and mother” (Coghill, 1971). The idea of sexual union directly contrasts with the concept of a female who is at once a virgin and mother, thus placing the ideal of femininity as beyond human female attainment (Lerer, 2006). Chaucer introduces a notion of human triviality: if Mary is simultaneously ideal and unattainable, then there is no human answer to love and no satisfaction but that of the divine. Yet, Troilus makes this mistake again and again. Troilus refers to Criseyde as she “who brought my soul to heaven and to rest,” even claiming that when his heart and body die, his spirit will rush to her (Coghill, 1971). Stephen A. Barney, in his essay “Troilus Bound,” believes that Troilus merely longs for “a fixed point or stable ground, a love of steel which he believes he has found in Criseyde” (Barney, 1992). However, this view trivializes Chaucer’s specific diction. The narrator repeatedly draws parallels between Criseyde and heaven

itself. In an outrageous act of apostrophe, Troilus is committing more than ignorance of Christianity, he is trivializing its concept in the favor of the human concept of earthly and erotic love. The elements of divine love are all present in Troilus: devotion, a notion of paradise, even the exact Christian words used to praise the Virgin Mary. The irony is that, in his paganism, Troilus is unaware of Christianity and is thus destined to somehow fall short. His love is doomed just as it has begun.

If we are to understand Troilus and Criseyde's love in terms of a religious moral, it becomes necessary to consider Chaucer's complex religious background. In her book *Chaucer and Religion*, Helen Cooper explains that "For Chaucer, Christianity was a given, and faith was effectively the only option available" (Cooper, 2010). Yet, it was also true that "whatever the medieval ego may pretend to itself about pious motivation, the medieval id always had its fist deep in the till grubbing for money or for power...in [Chaucer's] lifetime there were two rival popes, one based at Rome and one at Avignon" (Cooper, 2010). Religion then, for Chaucer and his contemporaries, becomes a complex and nuanced belief system. Although the church, as well as its priests and popes, appear corrupt, religion itself, a belief in god and devotion as a way of life, were still very much part of the basis for medieval culture. We see an example of this in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, a largely satirical work which emphasizes the corruption of largely religious figures, priests and priestesses, but never directly questions the basis of religion. If we relate this to *Troilus and Criseyde*, the problem that Troilus' religious apostrophe raises is not his lack of devotion to the church, it is an obliviousness to Christianity as a whole. It is difficult to argue that Chaucer is here making a personal statement about his own beliefs, but it is likely that he uses a common understanding of Christianity to relate to his contemporary readers. Cooper argues, "Satire itself requires a common belief system, a set of values shared between author and

reader, if it is to work at all; and for Chaucer, that system is a Christian one” (Cooper, 2010). It’s true that the framework of the conventional medieval love story allows the reader to engage with Chaucer’s satire, however, this is not just true of satire but of all writing. In an overwhelmingly hegemonic Christian culture, it is possible that Chaucer condemns Troilus’ paganism in favor of Christianity in an attempt to relate the love story to his modern audience.

Inherent paganism, and thus an obliviousness to Christianity, are Troilus’ downfall in more respects than a misplaced love. He bases many of his actions, decisions, and reasoning on paganist ideals regarding fortune, fate, and destiny. In Book 4, Troilus is faced with the prospect of Criseyde being sent to the Greek camp. Distraught, he runs through multiple courses of action with Pandarus, many of which he disregards due to their conflicts with honor, loyalty, and the couple’s ultimate happiness. Yet, when he finally decides to let his love go, he bases his decision on a pagan misconception of the Christian idea of God’s foresight.

‘And, beside all this, I say this there to,
that just as when I know there is a thing,
then that thing must necessarily be so,
so also, when I know a thing is coming,
so it must come: and thus the befalling
of things that are known before they arrive,
can not be evaded on any side.’
Then he said thus: ‘Almighty Jove enthroned,
who know of all things the truthfulness,
take pity on my sorrow, and let me die soon,
or lead Cressid and I from this distress.’ (Coghill, 1971)

Troilus concludes that Cressid’s loss must exist in order to be known, and thus will undoubtedly occur. He accordingly disregards any option of free will and throws himself on the mercy of a higher power to somehow save him and Cressid. Nuttall makes the point that Troilus’ conclusion can be interpreted as a paganist ignorance of Boethius’s *De Consolatione Philosophiae*. She claims Boethius’ highly Christian manuscript argues “that God’s foresight does not in fact

obliterate human free will because God sees all events simultaneously in an eternal present without causing or presupposing events” (Nuttal, 2012). Chaucer, having undertaken the translation of Boethius’ *De Consolatione Philosophiae* in the early 1380’s, would have been intimately acquainted with this line of reasoning (Benson, 1992). Chaucer critic David Benson even argues that Chaucer’s work in translation affected “almost all that he wrote at that time” (Benson, 1992). Thus, it is unlikely that Troilus’ internal debate is merely circumstantial. Troilus, caught up in a linear perception of fortune, is unable to comprehend Boethius’ point that the divine can view both the present state and the final outcome. He does not factor in the important Christian notion of free will and accordingly bases his decision on his own pagan reasoning. As his choice ultimately ends in heartbreak, he is, in a sense, being punished for his paganism.

Troilus is strongly influenced in his decision by yet another pagan notion: a reliance on human love. In response to Criseyde’s promises of faithfulness, Troilus agrees to their separation and swears his own faithfulness in reciprocity.

‘Now God, from who is hidden no how or why,
give me joy, indeed I never to Cressid
(since the very day I first saw her with my eye)
was false, nor ever will be till I die.
In short, you may believe me in truth,
I saw no more: put me to the proof.’ (Coghill, 1971)

Troilus speaks of Criseyde in similar terms as he would a divine revelation: she opened his eyes and there was no going back. Still, his words are focused on the span of human life: he speaks as if his passion will culminate when he dies, revealing a continued ignorance of Christianity. He is focused on human matters and places dependence on the fickle passion of a fellow pagan woman. In a Christian text, it naturally follows that a decision based so strongly on two pagan ideals will end in unhappiness. Chaucer ultimately states that a life lived in ignorance of

Christianity is meaningless.

If we choose to pursue a Chaucerian interpretation of Shakespeare's Troilus, it is possible to view the hero's faults as a continuation of Troilus' pagan failings. Troilus exhibits pride and vanity, similar to Chaucer's apostrophe, when he compares his love for Cressida to others.

True swains in love shall in the world to come
Approve their truth by Troilus. When their rhymes,
Full of protest, of oath and big compare,
Wants similes, truth tired with iteration—
'As true as steel, as plantage to the moon,
As sun to day, as turtle to her mate,
As iron to adamant, as earth to th' centre'—
Yet, after all comparisons of truth,
As truth's authentic author to be cited,
'As true as Troilus' shall crown up the verse
And sanctify the numbers. (3.2.169-178)

Using hyperbole, Troilus paints his love as an ideal to all other lovers. He portrays himself as the answer to their suffering similes and as true (if not more so) than any natural comparison, such as the sun to the moon. In her essay titled "As false as Cressid": Virtue Trouble from Chaucer to Shakespeare, Holly Crocker points to this moment as an example of Troilus' vanity. She claims: "the vanity of such excellence hollows out the very qualities that were supposedly worthy of admiration" (Crocker, 2013). While it is true that Troilus' vanity seems to cheapen his love for Cressida, his words also echo those of Ovid's Narcissus in that they almost seem deserving of a fall from grace. Perhaps his greatest stretch is in the use of "sanctify," which has a religious context, although there is no mention of divine love. From a Chaucerian perspective, Troilus' pagan words are ignorant and self-serving. One could argue that Troilus' devotion is misplaced, similarly to that of Chaucer's Troilus.

Yet, there is a pessimistic element to Shakespeare's work that does not quite align with Chaucer's. This can be found especially in Troilus' later words to Cressida.

Cressid, I love thee in so strain'd a putrid
That the best gods, as angry with my fancy,
More bright in zeal than the devotion which
Cold lips blow to their deities, take thee from me. (IV.iv. 24-27)

Once more we see an allusion to the gods, as well as a comparison of his earthly love to that of religious devotion. However, Shakespeare's Troilus is not ignorant of his apostrophe. He embraces it. He uses the almost heretical comparison to strengthen the argument of the depth of his love for Cressida. Troilus is even more aware of the wrong-doing he is committing by acknowledging the god's punishment. It is as if he has given away Chaucer's own punchline an entire act too soon. An awareness of Chaucer's own writing adds a sense of unease to this passage: Shakespeare has acknowledged Chaucer's message and decided to expand upon it. Troilus' awareness paints a sharp contrast to Chaucer's Troilus, who commits apostrophe after apostrophe, alternatively praises and bemoans his pagan gods, and is fully unaware of the consequence of his lack of Christianity. Shakespeare's Troilus, unlike Chaucer's, is not only aware of the depth of the comparisons he makes, going so far as to reference the gods in trivial manner, but he also senses that he might be missing something, that the love he and Cressida share may not be as fulfilling as they presume. He speaks of love as a "thrice-repured nectar" whose sweetness will cause him to "lose distinction" in his "joys" (3.2.16-25). He worries that once he partakes in love it will prove too sweet, that the realization of his desire will ruin its worth. Troilus is sensing that he is disillusioned with the fullness of human life, a topic that Shakespeare explores more through the play. It is possible to consider Shakespeare's model of love as a mere reflection of Chaucer's in that it is meaningless without an element of divine love. Yet Troilus and Cressida's ability to recognize and even question the trivial nature of their

human lives speaks to Shakespeare's desire to take his point in a separate direction from Chaucer.

Troilus and Cressida takes its concerns with desire even further by tying in the Renaissance notion of sexual fulfillment and dying (Crocker, 2013). This is most evident in Pandarus' song to Helen and Paris.

Love, love, nothing but love, still love, still more!
For, O, love's bow
Shoots buck and doe.
The shaft confounds
Not that it wounds,
But tickles still the sore.
These lovers cry, O ho, they die!
Yet that which seems the wound to kill,
Doth turn O ho! to ha, ha he!
So dying love lives still. (3.1.109-118)

The song is indicative of a much drawn parallel throughout the play: that of love and war.

Pandarus insists that there is "nothing but love," yet the play centers around a great battle.

Pandarus' words irrevocably tie the two. He goes on to use the shaft of an arrow as a phallic metaphor; the verse is imitating sexual intercourse. Pandarus uses the term "die"

interchangeably as to mean reaching orgasm. This is seen throughout the play as Shakespeare explores the conflict of achieving something and having it maintain its value. Troilus then, in his concern with the atrophy of human desire, is also exploring ideas of fatality. To consummate love with Cressida is also a kind of death: that of his initial desire for her. His love for her, and all the loves within the play, notably Paris and Helen, become a sort of battle. Yet, the idea of winning is tainted by the notion of achievement lessening value. Troilus has begun to explore existentialism. Without Chaucer's addition of a divine, universal truth (Book Five), one must begin to question whether Shakespeare is here making a statement regarding the inherently flawed nature of human love and mortal life.

Troilus' choice to consummate his love with Cressida, and ultimately his choice to accept her loss to the Greek camp, stem from the same reasoning: Troilus' innate selfishness. The language surrounding his initial pursuit of Cressida invokes a sense of worth and value, such as when he cries to Apollo, "What Cressid is, what Pandar, and what we? Her bed is India; there she lies, a pearl" (1.1.95-96). Helen Cooper, in her book "Shakespeare and the Medieval World," derives that "The play's relentless focus on value takes as its measure market economics rather than inherent quality...worth is repeatedly downgraded into exchange value" (Cooper, 2010). Troilus's idea of Cressida is less about the woman herself and more about what he sees as her value, as evidenced by his comparison of her to a pearl. Furthermore, the overall context of his statement is a question of identity, leading the reader to associate Cressida merely with her "exchange value" and Troilus with the same value that he would gain by the acquisition of Cressida. Troilus' love for Cressida stems from her value; he selfishly wishes to gain said value for himself.

The ultimate test of Troilus's love, the moment when Cressida is traded to the Greeks, reveals where his true values lie, as it does in Chaucer's work. However, unlike Chaucer's emphasis on Troilus' Christian (and Boethian) ignorance, Shakespeare instead chooses to deepen Troilus' ultimately selfish nature. When Troilus hears of the exchange, he responds simply: "Is it concluded so?" and "How my achievements mock me!" (IV.ii.68-71). In his introduction to the 2001 reprinting of *Troilus and Cressida* by The Arden Shakespeare, David Bevington concludes that "these words bespeak an immediate resignation on Troilus' part" (Bevington, 2001). If we accept Bevington's opinion that Troilus is resigned to his fate, the question remains as to why he would give up what he appeared to fight so hard for. A possible answer can be found in the parallel between Helen and Cressida. Troilus was faced with a similar situation in the councils of

Trojan leadership in the famous debate over Helen. The similarities between the two women are not to be dismissed; Troilus refers to Helen, like Cressida, as “a pearl / Whose price hath launched a thousand ships” (2.2.81-82). In regards to the debate over Helen, Troilus establishes the importance of honor. Bevington argues, “She was achieved in a trade: the Grecians keep aunt Hesione, and so the Trojans get to keep Helen, whom Paris brought Thomas as a ‘noble prize’ . What is vitally at stake is not the woman herself so much as the honor of the men who all cried ‘Go, go!’ and thereby put their honour on the line for the possession of the ‘prized’ object that they have admittedly ‘stol’n’...” (Bevington, 2001). What the men value more than the woman herself is the notion of honor that surrounds her. Helen keeps her “pearl” value so long as the keeping of her still affords them honor. In her essay, “The Two Party System in Troilus and Cressida,” Linda Charnes clarifies Troilus’ argument: “Troilus is calling everyone’s bluff, saying...if now you want to acknowledge her absurdity, well, our entire identity structure... would collapse (Charnes, 2003). Troilus’ stance is clear: everything they have done regarding Helen, both the taking and the keeping of her, was done for honor. They must continue to fight or else debase their entire value system.

This same notion of honor occurs throughout his crisis with Cressida. His “public sense of honor” allows him only two brief lines of hesitance, as “the honorable course is to keep Helen at any cost...that cost is his giving up Cressida” (Bevington, 2001). Far more than he should value their love, their time together, or her continued presence by his side, Troilus values honor: not just that of his Trojan community, but his own. Honor is a Chaucerian theme as well, as Donaldson points out: “He puts the maintenance of her ‘honor’ first in his scale of values—even before his love for her—with the result that, when her exchange for Antenor is arranged between the Trojans and the Greeks, there is nothing Troilus can do... any action he takes will reveal their

relationship and thus ruin Criseyde's 'honor', which depends...on secrecy" (Donaldson, 1985) Yet, in Chaucer's portrayal, Troilus makes a sacrifice for his lover, whereas Shakespeare's Troilus' sacrifice is a sham. It exposes the selfish nature of his "sacrifice" and is in truth a metaphor for the ideals of his society which really only serve the purposes of those who perpetrate them.

Troilus' turmoil has never truly been about Cressida, she is only an "achievement" that "mocks" him. Even in the very end, when Cressida has betrayed him, Troilus tears up her letter without reading it (5.2). He wins her for her value, gives her up for his honor, and is numb to her when she no longer has anything left to offer him. According to this interpretation, Troilus' love is inherently flawed. The Troilus of Chaucer's imaginings has an almost heavenly devotion and simply is ignorant of where he should apply it: ultimately, he still values true love. Furthermore, Chaucer goes overboard in his description of the lover's grief in the news of their separation, even more than the source which he bases his story upon, placing special emphasis upon their pain. Yet, Shakespeare chooses to diminish their separation almost to the point of satire, with Troilus' sole line: "How my achievements mock me!" Shakespeare purposefully chooses to leave out the lovers' agony and despair, painting his couple as colder, less attached, perhaps even unsurprised by their fate as if aware of the unjust nature of their love and their world. There is a deeply selfish aspect to the love of Shakespeare's Troilus. Not only is his love missing a divine quality, it is questionable as to whether it is true love at all.

Just as Helen and Cressida are irrevocably tied by their comparison to a pearl, Troilus and Paris are connected by their love for their respective women. Paris, in pertaining to his sense of honor, had no choice but to kidnap Helen; Troilus, for his own honor, had no choice but to let Cressida go. By comparing two male lovers Shakespeare fundamentally refutes one of Chaucer's

major statements: that of Troilus' exceptionalism.

In Chaucer, Troilus' exceptionalism is evidenced by his being granted the ability to simultaneously see both eternity and earth. Some critics view this moment as incongruous with the previous books in the poem. Brother Anthony argues that the stanzas are "an aesthetic blemish, a failure to preserve the unity of the work to the end" (Brother Anthony, 2003).

However, such an argument would belittle Chaucer's heavenly references, invocations of Dante, and Troilus' references to the Virgin Mary that are so integral to his character development.

Chaucer concludes his final book with a final reference to Christ.

And love Him, who truly out of love
on a cross, to redeem our souls that day,
first died, then rose, to sit in heaven above:
for he deceives no one, I say,
who his heart shall wholly on him lay.
And since He is best to love, and most meek,
what need is there for feigned loves to seek? (Coghill, 1971)

Troilus's love that he bore for Criseyde was only a mockery of the true love that Chaucer directs towards Christ. Christ is not fickle, he is "best to love." Unlike Criseyde, who chooses present happiness over an uncertain future with Troilus, Christ dies out of love. In his essay "Christian Revelation and the Cruel Game of Courtly Love in Troilus and Criseyde," Tison Pugh articulates the difference between Troilus and Criseyde's "feigned love" and Christ's true love. "The close of the narrative thus apparently highlights the stability of celestial love, the transience of early delights, and the folly of human games. In this vision, Criseyde serves as a fallen image, an earthly prefiguring of heavenly love...thus Troilus' allegiance to the unfaithful, mutable Criseyde cannot possibly bring him happiness" (Pugh, 2005). Troilus' only flaw is his love for a fickle human. Yet, his love for Criseyde is still "allegiance" and in its whole heartedness echoes the narrator's insistence that one lay his heart "wholly on him." While deeply flawed in his

paganism, Troilus still invites sympathy. Thus, Troilus alone, for his exceptional devotion that is so close to heavenly, is offered a glimpse of eternity as a reward. Some critics argue that, in fact, Troilus' fate in Chaucer's ending is just as dark as that of Shakespeare's, for even though he is offered a glimpse of eternity it is never promised to him. However, Chaucer's final ending echoes the Boethian teachings that Troilus was so ignorant of in the beginning of the poem: Boethius argues that true comfort can be found in knowing the difference between temporary and permanent goods (Blackwood, 2015). Although Troilus is not offered redemption, he is offered an understanding of it. He finally recognizes the difference between temporary earthly love and permanent divine love, and finds mirth. Chaucer offers him the comfort that Shakespeare explicitly denies.

However, Shakespeare's Troilus, when viewed in comparison to Paris, is far from exceptional. Similarly to Paris, he values honor and bases his actions off of it just as Paris does. Both men have made a choice and Shakespeare chooses to reveal the consequences of those choices: Paris' actions result in a war that kills thousands of men, and Troilus is granted no satisfaction, but a seemingly unending battle for a false love (Act 5). Ironically, their values have done nothing for them. When you examine the idea of values throughout the play, Shakespeare's overwhelming portrayal of their society lacks a true standard of value altogether. As Donaldson points out, "The play is full of passionate statements of ideals which are then ignored by the very characters who stated them...Troilus, at first rendered by love too woman-weak to fight, fighting a moment later, and by the end of the play fighting and urging Hector to fight, like a merciless madman; in council arguing that the Trojans should keep Helen because one must at all costs hold on to the things one values, and then making no effort to prevent Cressida's transfer to the Greek camp" (Donaldson, 1985). Although his characters profess to fight for honor or to be

honorable, they are unable to prove consistent or true. A particular example of this can be found in the character of Hector. A man lauded for his heroism, Hector makes a grand gesture in the name of fair play and allows Achilles to pause their battle when Achilles' "Arms are out of use" (5.6.17). However, instead of being praised or in some way rewarded for his honorable action, Hector is brutally slaughtered on Achilles's orders. Even as he begs, invoking the terms of their last battle: "I am unarmed. Forgo this vantage, Greek" (5.9.9), Achilles is deaf to his protests. Ultimately, there is no point to Hector's honor and what he most values becomes his vulnerability. Honor is revealed to be much like Hector's golden armor, "Most putrefied core, so fair without, / Thy goodly aromas thus hath cost thy life" (5.8.1-2). Beautiful at first, honor at length proved empty and rotten and resulted in death. The characters of Hector, Paris, and Troilus are not victims of "misplaced love" as is Chaucer's Troilus, for their guises of love and honor fall flat when faced with the reality of life. Accordingly, the notion of eternity and justification is absent; their punishments are death and discord.

In response to Shakespeare's nihilistic view of the importance of valuing honor, a Chaucerian interpretation of these events could imply that Troilus, Paris, and Hector's fault lay in their fickle human value rather than a value of the divine. However, where *Troilus and Criseyde* offers a glorious ending, full of divine truth, and offering eternity as a justification for all forms of suffering, *Troilus and Cressida* ends with death and disease. Its heroes prove to not be so heroic after all. In her essay, "Shakespeare's Relation to Tradition", Janet Spens claims that "Again, the only comfort of tragedy is its own completeness. This decay is the essence of humanity, which no god can know: in this awful desolation, whatever gods there be are powerless against us, because the worst has happened" (Spens, 1876). While Spens speaks mostly in regards to *King Lear*, the same notion of tragedy holds true for *Troilus and Cressida*.

Similarly to Chaucer's *Troilus*, Shakespeare's *Troilus* is guilty of imaginative convictions, so much so that even Cressida realizes too that 'women are angels, wooing', yet, Shakespeare goes even further to ask what meaning we have when we realize that human love is imperfect, human, and not divine. Without a promise of eternity, or of redemption, it leaves us with a hollow normal life, which may be filled with apostrophe, but is, in reality, the worse for wear. Cooper compares the endings of the poem and the play, noting that "The Epilogue, spoken by Pandarus, is a massive fall from...Chaucer's ending..." She goes on to explain that "the principle of love as the grounding of the universe...is necessary if [Chaucer's] work is not to fall into the kind of black hole that Shakespeare's *Troilus* finds himself in" (Cooper, 2010). Where Chaucer offers love and justification, Shakespeare strips his hero, and his audience, of redemption. *Troilus* has proved to be an utterly selfish character; to offer him eternity would make no sense in Shakespeare's context. Cooper notes, "And with no alternative voice located outside the narrative to offer any other perspective, there is no reassurance for the audience. They are left just with Pandarus, and his refusal to recognize that there is any dimension to existence beyond his own disease-ridden bones" (Cooper, 2010). Shakespeare leaves his audience no eternity, only Pandarus' disease.

While it is true that there is very little hope or elements of greater meaning, besides his highly nihilistic one, Shakespeare does not leave his audience with nothing. In place of a divine eternity Shakespeare offers a human-esque eternity. One need only look to Pandarus' early proclamation: "Let all constant men be Troiluses, all false women Cressids" (3.2.197-198). Shakespeare has given the name and reputation of his hero and heroine their own eternity. It is painfully apparent that such an eternity is melancholy: it slanders Cressida's name and offers the characters themselves neither happiness nor relief. Even *Troilus* cannot escape his sad eternity,

“true” though his name may be. A more accurate “eternity” for Troilus and Cressida is its nature as a “problem play”: one with discord at its very center, where Chaucer’s divine eternity is nowhere to be found. Furthermore, Shakespeare has given us an understanding of his society. In his book *Essays on Shakespeare and other Elizabethans*, Tucker Brooke presents *Troilus and Cressida* as Shakespeare’s “most definitive realization of the social forces operative in England at the end of Queen Elizabeth’s reign” (Brooke, 1946). The society of Troy becomes a mirror to the society of Shakespeare and his contemporaries. Thompson writes, “The fall of Troy was to the Elizabethans, as it had been to Chaucer, the great symbol of the precariousness and mutability of organized society, and one of the reasons for the success of *Troilus and Criseyde* must have been that Chaucer managed to set an archetypal personal tragedy against the familiar background of an archetypal social tragedy” (Thompson, 1978). While Chaucer’s tactic serves to illuminate the power of the divine in comparison to a precariously organized yet, in a sense, sophisticated society, Shakespeare uses the deeply decrepit nature of his Troy to heighten the tragedy. He destroys an idealized society: nothing makes sense for there is no redemption in love and war. It is entirely possible that in reaction to his time’s fascination with the downfall of Troy, Shakespeare used the tale to parallel his own society’s inner religious, political, and romantic turmoil.

Chapter 2: Criseyde and Cressida:

How differing depictions of “falsehood” shape Shakespeare’s and Chaucer’s respective morals

It is tempting to perceive Chaucer’s Criseyde as a one-sided prop to Troilus’ journey, and Shakespeare’s Cressida as yet another dissonant cog in the wheel of an overwhelmingly problematic play. However, when we consider the heroines simply in the context of their author’s text, without the disengagement of Boccaccio or the disenchanted final word of Henryson’s *The Testament of Cresseid*, Criseyde and Cressida become more and more similar, and not necessarily in a negative light. In a general sense, the heroines undergo a similar plot: they choose temporal happiness over a possible future happiness with Troilus, and their overall character arch shifts from the enchanting love interest to the medieval, inconstant heartbreaker. The effects of these changes, however, shift from Chaucer to Shakespeare. While Cressid’s choices overall remain the same, their contexts differ greatly. Criseyde’s flaws, while relatively understandable, seem enormously consequential in comparison to the heavenly, although misplaced, devotion of her Troilus. In order for Chaucer to make the point that she is the human, earthly, and ultimately flawed alternative to the eternity of Chaucer’s final book, he must in a sense demonize his Criseyde. On the other hand, Shakespeare’s lack of catharsis creates a different tone for his Cressida: although flawed, she appears no more corrupt or selfish than the warring, deceptively honorable men around her. Her betrayal is exactly what the audience has come to expect from Shakespeare’s Troy. Ultimately, the characters of Criseyde and Cressida tell us more about the world of Chaucer and Shakespeare’s imagining, as well as the audiences that they were writing for. The differing levels of blame which Chaucer and Shakespeare attribute to their heroines’ falsehood shapes their ultimate moral messages: while Chaucer’s Criseyde serves as a sharp contrast to heavenly redemption, Shakespeare’s Cressida becomes yet another piece of the corrupt world in which both she and Troilus are left to suffer. Chaucer’s

moral message reflects an emphasis upon heavenly devotion, while Shakespeare's illustrates a disillusionment with society at large.

What has been referred to as the "deterioration of Criseyde's character from Chaucer's time to Shakespeare's" (Schreyer, 2014), is largely a dangerous presumption; the blame which we place on Criseyde is heightened by his overarching moral message and lessened by the context of Shakespeare's world. One could make the case that, in actuality, Chaucer's Criseyde is more malodorous, especially in light of his all too perfect Troilus. Similarly to Cressida, Criseyde ultimately betrays Troilus for Diomedes under ambiguous reasons, but her character faces a much more dramatic shift, leading Donaldson to remark, "Chaucer's narrator gives us precious little information about Criseyde, and when he does give some, it is often... paradoxical and ambiguous" (Donaldson, 1985). Donaldson's point illustrates the remarkable shift we see in Criseyde's character: from a witty, widowed love interest to Troilus' betrayer. Lisa Kiser, in her criticism, *Reading Medieval Culture: Essays in Honor of Robert W. Hanning*, defines this paradox.

How has Chaucer managed to turn the fascinating character we come to know in books two and three, full of nuance and humor and life, into the kind of female character we see represented practically everywhere else in late medieval literature: an inconstant woman who seduces men, tricks them, and leads them unfailingly into a state of sorrow and woe? (Kiser, 2006).

Criseyde's character shifts: once a complex and engaging woman, worthy of happiness with Troilus, she becomes the villain, breaking Troilus' heart. It is important to consider how this change affects Troilus, for that is Chaucer's overarching message. In order to understand why Criseyde changes the way she does, it is necessary to take into account Chaucer's allegory. If Troilus misplaces heavenly devotion in Criseyde, whom Chaucer originally crafts as a sort of

virgin Mary, there must be a reminder of her humanity so that Troilus can realize he has given his heart to a fickle human subject.

This is not to say that Criseyde is inherently flawed, or that her gender as a woman categorizes her as flawed. As Angela Smith Weisl notes in *A Mannes Game*, “Criseyde performs both traditionally defined femininity—located primarily in her anxiety, her beauty, and her inconstancy—and a female masculinity that sows itself in a series of moves that attempt self-preservation” (Weisl, 2008). Weisl categorizes Criseyde as beautiful, yet essentially anxious, inconstant, and focused upon self-preservation—essentially, traits that classify her as human. Although it is difficult to distinguish this conclusion as more than simply a modern reading, in pursuing an interpretation of Criseyde as a humanly flawed but overall reasonable character, it is possible to find further reasons for which she may betray Troilus. Namely, that she has been given no reason throughout Chaucer’s entire poem that she can trust any man, let alone Troilus. She is initially abandoned by her father within the first one hundred lines of the poem. He knows that Troy will fall, and leaves town “softely,” “ful pryvely,” and “anon” (I.78-81). The state he leaves Criseyde in is crucial, for it demands that Troilus save her, but this does not change the fact that she is left a widow in a war-torn city, without father or friends. She is then traded to the enemy by the Trojan parliament, essentially being abandoned by the government who was supposed to protect her. Finally, Pandarus abandons her after Troilus has given her up, referring to Criseyde as one would an inconsequential accessory: “Forthi be glad, myn owen deere brother! / If she be lost, we shall recovere an other” (IV. 405-6). She is treated recklessly and with complete abandon, to expect her to be faithful would be to expect the kind of faith of which only Troilus appears to be capable.

Yet, Criseyde's worst abandonment, and the one that ultimately hurts her character the most, is her abandonment by the narrator. Noting that "the narrator suddenly intrudes to scold any reader who thinks she is falling in love too fast," Donaldson argues that "Once a reader has become suspicious, even the most innocent statements about Criseyde become suspect ... The sympathetic reader, on the other hand, will understand the words to mean that Criseyde is proceeding at precisely the right speed expected of a heroine whom one wishes to see give in, but not too fast" (Donaldson, 1985). While the bantering between Troilus and Criseyde may seem perfectly ordinary to a sympathetic reader, the readers of Chaucer's poem are highly aware that Criseyde will eventually betray her lover. Thus, the narrator's words appear as foreshadowing, tainting the heroine in our minds. Either way, her perfection is slightly shadowed.

Subconsciously at the very least, the narrator has put the idea of Criseyde's falsehood into the readers' minds. Whether or not we believe it at the time matters very little, for it ultimately eases our understanding of her betrayal later on. Furthermore, the narrator does nothing to assist this problem by giving insight into Criseyde's character or even her actions.

Instead, the majority of Criseyde's function as a character is to reveal more about Troilus. This is particularly relevant in the bedroom scenes. Criseyde, after Troilus faints and sighs in the midst of their wooing, demands, "Is this a mannes game? / What, Troilus, wol ye do thus for shame?" (III.1126-27). Her demands are centered around what Troilus thinks, what he wants, and what he feels. There is no indication of Criseyde's thoughts on the matter, and thus we do not consider her role in this love affair except for in the way that she affects Troilus. Weisl argues that, in this scene, it is "hard not to read into Criseyde's and Pandarus' questioning of Troilus' manhood" yet this ignores Chaucer's overarching intent as to what this scene does for Troilus, and how it ultimately affects Criseyde. Criseyde's questions serve merely to highlight

Troilus' fainting, a medieval gesture of love (Weisl, 2008), which thus proves the depth of his love for her. Conversely, it highlights Criseyde's lack of empathy, as she is only barely able to converse with Troilus, and offers none of her own commentary on the matter. Ultimately, we are reminded again of Troilus' misplaced love, bringing the reader back to Chaucer's overall emphasis upon heavenly love as opposed to the earthly and erotic.

The narrator further obscures Criseyde's voice in comparison to Troilus' and diminishes it by the presence of the men around her in her interactions with Diomedes. Kiser notes, "Diomedes speaks to Criseyde for fifty-seven lines on their way to the Greek camp, but Criseyde is silent. Then, when she does speak, we do not get direct speech, but only what the narrator says she said" (Kiser, 2006).

But natheles she thonked Diomede
Of al his travaile and his goode cheere,
And that hym list his frendshipe hire to bede;
And she accepteth it in good manere,
And wol do fayne that is hym lief and dere,
And tristen hym she wolde, and wel she myghte,
As seyde she; and from hire hors sh'alighte. (V.183-89)

Although the narrator does reveal that their dialogue causes Criseyde sorrow, "Hire thoughte hire sorwful herte brast a-two" (V.180), there is no reasoning or explanation as to why she would react in such a particular way to what is essentially the betrayal of Troilus. Whether her actions are caused by fear, gratitude, politeness, or love, there is no way of knowing, for the narrator has filtered her voice through his own lens. This passage serves as a hint similar to the narrators scolding of the reader; what the narrator does not say indicates more than what he does. We read between the lines and the result is that our preconceived notions of Criseyde filter her in a negative light. The turn of Criseyde from nuanced woman to medieval betrayer, as Kiser notes above, is truly an abandonment of Criseyde by the narrator. Chaucer does not care about the

development of Criseyde's character any longer, for she has served her purpose: to provoke Troilus. They "neglect in telling her side of the story in later books" (Weisl, 2008), leaving us only with Troilus' broken heart and a disillusioned opinion of Criseyde and humanity in general. Criseyde is flawed, just not without cause. It is the placement of these flaws in the larger context of Chaucer's moral allegory that diminishes them and gives us the "legend" of false Criseyde. It is necessary to demonize her so that she can stand in contrast to the redemption which Chaucer promises. As Donaldson notes, "Chaucer's greatest achievement with Criseyde is to invoke so much sympathy for her in the earlier part of the poem that her foreknown act of betrayal comes as a shock to the reader—not unlike the shock of tragedy—when what his mind has known all along will happen happens against the expectation of his heart" (Donaldson, 1985). The more we idealize Criseyde, our virgin Mary, in the beginning of Chaucer's poem, the more we can blame her when the human world reveals itself to be ultimately flawed.

Shakespeare's Cressida, however, embraces her flaws as they contribute to the overall corrupt world of Shakespeare's imagining. As Donaldson argues, "Shakespeare naturally understood the ambiguity with which the poem treated Criseyde, and that he implanted in Cressida a complex ambiguity of her own" (Donaldson, 1985). Donaldson notes early on a possible source of causation for Shakespeare's adaptation. However, he fails to examine the effect of her ambiguity. Cressida's ambiguity does not mirror Criseyde's in that we wonder what could have caused a shift in the way we perceive her, but in that we wonder the extent to which she is aware of her corrupt and rotten world.

One of the hints as to Cressida's perception could potentially be the words of a narrator. Although Shakespeare's story, unlike Chaucer's, is not explicitly guided by a narrator, one could consider Pandarus' final speech and overall presence to be a form of narration. In this case, our

narrator is highly pessimistic and not in the least impartial. His power, especially in Cressida's life, is not to be diminished. Yet, Cressida is more than aware of him, saying "Nay, I'll watch you for that; and that's one of the chieftest of them" (I.ii.266-270). She is more aware of him, at least, than Criseyde was of her narrator, who played a heavy-handed role in damaging her reputation. Her awareness of Pandarus, at the very least, hints that Cressida is to some extent knowledgeable of the way her world has treated her, and consequentially the corruptness of her world. She is aware enough to fight against it by constantly drawing away from Pandarus (III,ii), yet has very little power to fight his influence.

Still, the lack of a consistently present narrator allows the characters to form their own narration, and gives Cressida the voice that Criseyde lacked. Occasionally, this serves the same purpose as Criseyde's narrator, sewing doubt as to her faithfulness.

Prophet may you be!
 If I be false, or swerve a hair from truth,
 When time is old and hath forgot itself,
 When waterdrops have worn the stones of Troy,
 And blind oblivion swallow'd cities up,
 And mighty states characterless are grated
 To dusty nothing, yet let memory,
 From false to false, among false maids in love,
 Upbraid my falsehood! when they've said 'as false
 As air, as water, wind, or sandy earth,
 As fox to lamb, as wolf to heifer's calf,
 Pard to the hind, or stepdame to her son,'
 'Yea,' let them say, to stick the heart of falsehood,
 'As false as Cressid.' (III.ii.101-115).

Cressida, like Chaucer's narrator, insinuates the same doubt that Criseyde's narrator does when he begs the reader not to presume that Criseyde is falling in love too fast. Yet, this idea, in Cressida's speech, is tied with the destruction of civilization. Should her falseness prove to come to fruition, as we know it does, it is no longer a solitary event, but a realization of the worst end of the world coming to fruition as well. In the context of Shakespeare's overtly corrupt and

rotten world, Cressida's betrayal is but one piece of the overall dismal reality, one that Cressida seems subtly aware of.

Cressida's awareness is important, for it allows her to make educated decisions based on those around her, and, unlike Criseyde, the lack of narrator allows her to explain these decisions. Similarly to Criseyde, the men in Cressida's life continue to let her down. However, unlike the Troilus of Chaucer's poem, the Troilus of Shakespeare's imagining is her worst betrayer. From the beginning, Troilus voices his doubts, speaking of love as a "thrice-repured nectar" whose sweetness will cause him to "lose distinction" in his "joys" (III.ii.16-25). From Pandarus' song tying love and death to Hector's golden armor filled with rot, the play is full of metaphors indicating that value and desire mask the sad realization of reality. Although Cressida ultimately falls victim to the ideal, she has her doubts and expresses them. In regards to Troilus, she proclaims, "Yet hold I off. Women are angels, wooing: Things won are done, joys soul lies in the doing. That she belov'd knows nought that knows not this: Men prize the thing ungain'd more than it is" (I.ii.311-316). Donaldson notes that these are "maxims, recorded in quotes by the printer of the quarto and gnomic sayings in Elizabethan play texts" (Donaldson, 1985). Cressida's hesitation is not only part of her character, she is subscribing to ideas of Shakespeare's time. As Donaldson points out, "Chaucer's Criseyde held off far longer and for far less apparent reason, and no one has ever chided her for it" (Donaldson, 1985). Shakespeare's Cressida gives reasoning that reflects the ideals of his time, further deepening the possible allegory between Elizabethan society and that of the Trojan War, whereas Criseyde's interaction only deepens her ambiguity. Even after Troilus and Cressida do finally sleep together, Troilus continues to disappoint, maintaining only a shadow of the devotion with which Chaucer's Troilus treated Criseyde. He practically runs out the door when it is morning. In response to

Cressida's plea, "I prithee now to bed," he replies, "O Cressida, but that the busy day, / Waked by the lark, hath roused the ribald crows / And dreaming night will hide our joys no longer, I would not from thee" (IV.ii.9-12). To which Cressida responds, "You men will never tarry. / O foolish Cressid, I might have still held off / and then you would have tarried" (IV.ii.18-20).

Cressida blames herself, which can lead the audience to blame her as well, but it is important to consider why she blames herself. She is upset that she did not expect Troilus to be shallow, unloving, callous, and cold. She blames herself, "O foolish Cressid," for believing him and not expecting him to lie to her as to the extent of his love for her. Cressida's mourning is, in effect, a realization of the corrupt nature of men and the hurtful game that love can be. Her frustration extends, not just to Troilus, but to all men, for "you men will never tarry." There is no moral high ground in Cressida's story, no ideal lover or man at all which Cressida hold as a standard. Her Troilus does not deserve the catharsis of the knowledge of redemption, only fitting in this corrupt and rotten world.

It is difficult to disregard such a reading of this scene when we see it contrasted so perfectly in *Romeo and Juliet*. We see the same initial pattern when Juliet, like Cressida, asks for her lover to stay longer in the morning: "Yon light is not some daylight... / Therefore stay yet; thou needst not be gone" (III.v.14015). Romeo initially responds as Troilus does, claiming that the morning has come and he must be gone: "It was the lark, the herald of the morn, / No nightingale... I must be gone and live, or stay and die" (III.v.16-17). Beyond the words' functional meaning, Shakespeare's metaphor for the realization of desire is repeated when Romeo claims that he must not "stay and die." Although he is referring to the dangerous feud between their two families, it is also implied that having consummated their love, their desire has died. Such a response procures the same mourning from Juliet as it does from Cressida, yet the

response of their lovers is different: Romeo ultimately changes his mind. When Juliet protests, he quickly replies, “I have more care to stay than will to go. / Come, death, and welcome! Juliet wills it so” (III.v.23-24). Death, whether of body or desire is secondary to the young lovers’ commitment. Romeo, ultimately, proves to be a truer lover, although whether this is due to his character or, as is hinted later on, the young, immature, and unrealized nature of their love, is unclear. Whichever the case, in the development of this scene from *Romeo and Juliet* to *Troilus and Cressida*, we see a shift in Shakespeare towards pessimism.

Troilus’ lack of “fainting love” for his beloved is apparent in more than just the bedroom scene. When Cressida is traded for the sake of the war, he gives her up instantly, saying there is “no remedy.” His lackluster love is appallingly evident when we compare this scene to Chaucer’s poem, wherein the narrator takes the reader through Troilus’ entire thought process (Book 4). In contrast, Shakespeare’s Troilus’ protest is limited to “Is it concluded thus?” He does not fight for her, and it is accordingly unexpected that Cressida would fight for him. Yet, where Chaucer’s Criseyde’s resignation is quick and absolute, Cressida cries out, “O you immortal gods! I will not go!” This change, although unexpected, reveals the depth of Cressida’s love. Even Criseyde, who is presumed at this moment to still be faithful to Troilus, is not as broken at the thought of their parting. While this, to some critics, is an indication that Cressida is fickle, that her passion in this moment should indicate faithfulness throughout, this scene reveals that, at least in this moment, she is true. It also allows her falsehood to happen as a result of her later situation within the Greek camp, where she has lost all hope, and has finally been abandoned by all the men that she trusted. Instead of being fickle, her decision is pragmatic. In comparison to Criseyde, she is more dedicated to Troilus even in a time of hardship. For all the signs that he does not love her as he promised he would, Cressida is the more loyal lover. Although Cressida

ultimately betrays Troilus, for increasingly good reasons, there is little evidence that she is inherently false, that her lack of faith to her lover is a character flaw.

Cressida goes so far as to imply that there is no such thing as perfect, earthly love, something that Troilus never quite grasps. Cressida tells him, “but you are wise, or else you love not; for to be wise and love exceeds man’s might: that dwells with gods above” (IV.iv.153-155). Her words echo Chaucer’s in that they indicate a belief in a higher love; her words mark a distinct separation between the human and the divine. To Cressida, she and Troilus are both incapable of both wisdom and love. Thus, the kind of devotion which we attribute to Chaucer’s Troilus is, to Cressida, devoid of wisdom. Cressida has laid out the argument of both author’s worlds: for Shakespeare, there is only love without wisdom or wisdom without love, whereas Chaucer offers Troilus a glimpse of the divine. Thus, Cressida’s choosing Diomedes in her test of faith is less a choice against love, but a decision in that moment to pursue wisdom, for “to be wise and love exceeds man’s might.” It is much more difficult to blame Cressida when the decision is not entirely selfish.

The question of Cressida’s inherent “falsehood” is called into question once more when she departs for the Greek camp. In both Chaucer’s and Shakespeare’s interpretation, Troilus insists to her over and over again that she will be tempted to betray him. Yet, Cressida’s indignation at the accusation is well entitled. Donaldson notes that Chaucer’s Criseyde, on hearing similar distrustful words from her lover after losing eternal fidelity to him, had said, ‘you don’t trust me’. Shakespeare’s Cressida, even more justifiably indignant because she had managed only complete unwillingness to the Greek camp where she would meet these practiced wooers, cries, ‘oh heavens! You love me not!’ (Donaldson, 1985) She even asks him, “my lord, will you be true?” (4.4.?). There is a shift of doubt from Chaucer to Shakespeare in ‘trust’ to

‘love.’ Shakespeare’s take on the scene places doubt, not only on Cressida’s faithfulness, but on the strength of their love. Specifically, the shift targets Troilus, rather than Cressida for once. The unfounded doubt that Troilus feels towards Cressida is reciprocated, indicating that at this monumental moment, the love that they continue to swear to each other is rooted in uncertainty. This uncertainty is no longer just about the future, but about the inherent faithfulness of the lovers. Stephen J. Lynch suggests that “[i]n his enthusiasm to prove himself “most right,” [Troilus] seems almost willing to have [Cressida] prove false. Not only does he permit the exchange, but he also virtually tempts her to falsehood” (Lynch, 1986). Finally, Cressida is no longer the only one in question. This is fair, for although Troilus insists again and again in Act 4 that Cressida “be true,” he has no reason to do so unless he suspects her of proving false. Unlike Troilus, who leaves her so hurriedly in the morning, Cressida has displayed tireless devotion towards her lover. In this relationship, already having shifted towards corruption and betrayal, it would make little sense for the lovers to trust each other implicitly.

Furthermore, Cressida’s words indicate how distrustful she is of Troilus, making him much less of a god and more of a man than Chaucer ever did. The instances where Troilus’s love appear to make him naïve abound when she leaves him for Diomedes. Troilus postulates, “And with another knot, five-finger-tied, / The fractions of her faith, arts of her love, / the fragments, scraps, the bits, and greasy relics / of her overeaten faith, are abound to Diomedes” (V.ii. 155-60). His worries that love is a “thrice-repured nectar” whose sweetness will cause him to “lose distinction” in his “joys” (III.ii.16-25) have been realized in the form of Cressida. Once she has left him, he considers their love as mere scraps of the feast it once was, causing the audience to question whether or not it was truly love at all. The metaphor of the feast is in itself alarming, as it lacks sustainability and mutualism. Troilus’ anger also lacks a larger understanding of his

world, an understanding which he previously displayed. Just an act before he had told Pandarus, “Something may be done that we will not, / And sometimes we are devils to ourselves / When we will tempt the frailty of our powers, / Presuming on their changeful potency” (IV.iv. 93-96). Here, Troilus understands how powerless he and Cressida truly are, and attributes their overall selfish nature, being “devils to ourselves,” to any unhappy ending that may occur. It is their shared humanity, the ‘frailty of’ their ‘powers’, which ends up harming them both. Yet, when this does occur, he is blinded and blames only Cressida, contributing to the overall lasting impression of her faithlessness, and demonstrating that his “powers” are overwhelmingly frail. Shakespeare nods to Chaucer’s ultimate condemnation of her character, but in the context of Troilus’ own flawed nature, such a characterization fails to ring true.

It is possible to see Cressida’s actions as selfish, or weak, although it is difficult to entirely condemn her based on her final betrayal. Shakespeare critic Marianne Novy argues that in the moment when Cressida accepts Diomedes, she “submits with the weakness expected of her” (Novy, 1999). However, such an interpretation does a disservice to the care Shakespeare has taken to craft his Cressida. Weisl notes, “by maintaining her active, self-determining position within the war, instead of accepting the feminine vulnerability that brought about her trade in the first place, Cressida attempts to save herself, if not her reputation” (Weisl, 2008). Her decision may seem selfish and disappointing, but it is not invalid, and thus it is difficult to place blame upon her. Cressida, when giving her sleeve to Diomedes, says, “It was one who loved me better than you will” (V.v.186). Her actions, as Donaldson noted, seem to contradict her words. Even for all of Troilus’ flaws, she still loves him. The circumstances of the war, her vulnerable place within the Greek camp, and the balance between “love and wisdom” result in her choice to be false. However, rather than demonize her, Shakespeare’s portrayal of Troilus’s flaws serve to

lessen his identity as a martyr. Giving Cressida the voice that Chaucer denied her allows her to indicate her love for Troilus even as she hurts him. Seeing her pain in this moment humanizes her character, and makes it difficult to entirely blame her. When one regards the play as a whole, it is apparent that the lovers have, in a sense, equally harmed each other. At the end of the day, there is no narrator, and no god, to condone or forgive either of them. They are left only with their flaws and the consequences of their actions.

It is tempting to subscribe to the version of Cressida which is faithless and fickle, yet Shakespeare works hard to ensure that that is not all there is to her. History was not on his side; Donaldson argues that “Shakespeare was a victim of literary determinism: that is, because Henryson and his numerous imitators, both respectable poets and ballad makers, had made nasty remarks about the Cressid figure...there was nothing he could do but present a thoroughly malodorous Cressida” (Donaldson, 1985). Yet, such an argument entirely discredits Shakespeare’s ingenuity as a writer. Take, for instance, the transformation of the story of King Lear, once a historical story with a satiating, happy ending, into one of his darkest tragedies. Upon further evaluation, Donaldson’s argument fails to account for the positive qualities of Cressida’s character. If one were to view her character without the prejudice from Chaucer’s work, other qualities besides her faithlessness may make a lasting impression, such as “the brevity of her comments, their quick staccato quality” which “imparts vitality to her; and her questions establish her as someone unsure of herself, but alert and seeking answers” (Spens, 1972). She is, like the Troilus of Chaucer’s imagination, seeking something greater than anyone can offer. Cressida seeks wisdom, even as she shows a greater awareness than many characters within the play. At one point in her plight she jokes, “Upon my back, to defend my belly, upon my wit, to defend my wiles, upon my secrecy, to defend mind honesty, my mask, to defend my

beauty, and you, to defend all these; and at these wards I lie, at a thousand watches” (I.ii.358-264). Although some critics take this moment as an indication of her bawdiness, it also is an exploration of the many contradictions, not only within the play, but within society, and Cressida’s knowledge of this. She voices commentary about the world and uses satire to relate it to her audience, not unlike Chaucer. As Donaldson notes, “Everything Cressida says seems to be either backward or askew. I think the speech is the ironically wry statement of one who realizes how inadequate her defenses are against panders and Troilus from the outside and against her love for Troilus on the inside. She states her fears backward, as it were, punning when she says that she lies at all these wards” (Donaldson, 1985). It is the absence of Chaucer’s moral high ground which allows Cressida’s wisdom to shine through. For if she were merely to stand in contrast to Troilus’ redeemable qualities, her wisdom, wit, and acuity would be unable to distinguish themselves.

The lack of redemption present in Shakespeare’s play is guided by an important change that he makes to his adaptation: the emphasis upon the war surrounding his heroes. Every love scene between Troilus and Cressida is interrupted or juxtaposed by one of soldiers, generals, or outright battles. Cressida does not live in the “eden” of Criseyde’s poem: there are no paved parlors, gold-embroidered cushions, gardens with sanded paths, or attendant women. Furthermore, Cressida’s only confidante is Pandarus, “in whom she does not confide, for he is a very seedy uncle indeed compared to Criseyde’s and one intent on serving her up on a platter to his friend Prince Troilus” (Donaldson, 1985). Pandarus even goes to far as to compare the two lovers to two sides in a war: “Nay, you shall fight your hearts out ere I part you” (III.ii.45). The notion of winning and losing in love is established from the very beginning of their romance, and emphasized by the battle that goes on around them. Having the love story set in the context of

the war is one of the greatest “problems” of the play. For critics, it fits into Shakespeare’s works as neither a history nor a tragedy. However, the setting of Troy not only serves to illuminate how an idealized society, such as the England of Shakespeare’s lifetime, can hide a corrupt center, it helps us to make sense of the tragedy that is Troilus and Cressida’s love. Just as the numerous dead and unforgivable trauma of war makes it possible to argue that there can be no true winner, neither Troilus nor Cressida can win the battle of love. Everyone suffers, and no one comes out ahead.

In the end, Cressid’s betrayal affects the poem and the play’s conclusion in two different ways, altering the way we view Troilus’ end and the notion of “falseness.” For Chaucer, the poem concludes with Troilus: his realization and understanding of the divine allows the pain of his heartbreak to appear almost inconsequential. The startling contrast between his redemption and Criseyde being left to embody earthly corruption and lack of satisfaction, ultimately offers the poem’s reader catharsis: even though the world and human love have flaws, there is still something deeper that is worthy of devotion. Yet, for Shakespeare, the two lovers’ end is diminished by the continuation of the war and Pandarus’ revelations regarding their world. While Chaucer leaves worldly concerns behind, Shakespeare embraces them, dissolving his characters and their conflict in the context of a great battle where values such as love and honor are forgotten. Setting the lover’s quarrel in the context of a war that is itself based on a lovers’ quarrel reveals that the outcome, “faithlessness” or “betrayal,” is itself an extension of the harmful, dangerous, and destructive world around us. Thus, Shakespeare indicates a dissatisfaction with human love within our society, and makes no attempts to redeem it. Shakespeare asks his audience, what is the point? If we choose to pursue the idea that Shakespeare uses the war to mirror his own society, gilded on the outside and rotten on the

inside, Cressida is, in actuality, the closest a reader can come to empathizing with a citizen of such a world. Her choice is not that of Criseyde's, choosing human happiness over eternal devotion, but is a recognition that neither Troilus nor Diomedes will bring her happiness, for both are emblematic of her corrupt world. In a sense, hers is the only victory, for instead of denying the truth of her world, she embraces it.

Chapter 3: Redemption from Chaucer to Shakespeare

An analysis of religious morals in Troilus and Criseyde and Romeo and Juliet

Shakespeare, having famously enriched a majority of his plays using pre-existing poems, legends, and myths, faces criticism from those who deem originality to be the pinnacle of noteworthiness. Yet, *Romeo and Juliet*, like *Troilus and Cressida*, is a distinctive example of how a reimagining of a medieval tale's character, plot, and narration can illustrate the author's willingness to offer alternative themes and ideals. The story of Romeo and Juliet, to the extent of scholarly knowledge, first originated in Italian myth and spread throughout western Europe (Levenson, 2000). Its connections to Chaucer are, according to many critics, circumstantial. Thompson, who argues furtively that there is a distinct correlation between the two authors, also takes care to note critics' doubt. She points to the famous "morning after" bedroom scene which appears in both *Troilus and Criseyde* and *Romeo and Juliet*: "the resemblance seems to me a very general one. It is certainly of the medieval 'aubade' tradition in Shakespeare, but there are no unusual touches which would link these two particular examples, and nothing that Shakespeare could not have found in Brooke" (Thompson, 1978). Her point is valid: when we only examine individual scenes, such as the aubade, or individual characters who bear similarities, such as Romeo and Troilus, it is difficult to argue more than correlation between the works. However, when we examine the poem and the play comprehensively, examining not only individual scenes and motifs, but themes and morals, specifically how certain scenes and moments emphasize those themes, it becomes clear that the works not only show a commonality, but that Shakespeare's work could be argued to be a response to Chaucer's.

The themes of both works are founded in their categorization as “tragedy,” yet they differ in their approach to the genre. Aristotle, whose ideas both Chaucer and Shakespeare would have been familiar with, defines tragedy as “the imitation of an action that is serious and also, as having magnitude complete in itself; in appropriate and pleasurable language; in a dramatic rather than narrative form; with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish a catharsis of these emotions” (Aristotle, *Poetics*). In order to identify how the poem and the play differ in their approach to tragedy, it is important to deconstruct their approach to the “catharsis” which Aristotle deems crucial.

Although famous for its depiction of teenage love, *Romeo and Juliet* is more than a romance; the play’s tragedy, and corresponding catharsis, go much deeper. It is similar, in this sense, to *Troilus and Criseyde*, wherein Chaucer managed to turn Boccaccio’s portrayal of the woman who scorned him (Groves, 2007) into a sententious tale. Although, where Chaucer chooses to offer catharsis for his tragedy of human life in the notion of the divine, Shakespeare’s play focuses on the overall catharsis of human life. The type of love which Chaucer chooses to focus upon is not the fickle, human, “feigned love,” for that is secondary to that of “He” who is “best to love” (Coghill, 1971). Although Troilus’ love is intense and true, its subject is the fickle human Criseyde, leaving the reader only with the message of the “frailty of human beings” and the overall power of the divine. Troilus, who is all too human, is offered only a glimpse of redemption, enough to understand how secondary his human life truly was. In both Troilus’ final glance back at earth, and the end of his supposedly powerful human love, we are left with the message that human love is secondary and insignificant compared to religious love. According to John Lawlor, this is a perfect example of “the medieval conception of tragedy whose ‘central truth is that Fortune knows nothing of human deserving.’” Accordingly, “such a view of life is of

course saved from pessimistic absurdity by religion” (Lawlor, 1962). Chaucer’s moral, and overall catharsis which is so central to his tragedy, is the optimistic promise of a theological “greater good.”

In contrast, in Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*, the sententious “greater good” is rooted in resolution of the families’ feud. The lovers themselves, not their love, fails to survive, allowing value to be placed upon human love as well as human life. In the play’s prologue, the chorus promises both tragedy and redemption by valuing human life.

From forth the fatal loins of these two foes
A pair of star-crossed lovers take their life,
Whose misadventured piteous overthrows
Doth with their death bury their parents’ strife. (1. Prologue, 5-8)

The death of the two lovers offers a redemption of its own in the resolution of the two families’ feud. The human life that is not lost in Juliet’s tomb, or throughout the course of the, in many ways violent, play lives on, allowing the tragic death to have a larger moral beyond its initial tragedy. Shakespeare critic Uphaus notes that the overwhelming message of *Romeo and Juliet* is that there is a larger point to their love beyond its initial tragedy:

For such a sense of life’s continuation to occur, the value and magnitude of an individual life, on which tragedy is based, must be supplanted by, or rather incorporated in, a new set of values and experiences which assert the predominance and continuation of the life cycle generally, even as they limit the value of specific individual lives” (Uphaus, 2014).

Romeo and Juliet’s catharsis is rooted in the sense of the importance of human life, as well as the inclusion of human love. Lawlor notes that this sense of “greater good” and “central truth” is similar to Chaucer’s, as “the catastrophe that overtakes Romeo and Juliet leads directly to the recreation of order and love in a disordered society” (Lawlor, 1962). However, his argument does not consider the lack of spiritual sententiousness in the play’s end. We see a shift in perspective, from Chaucer’s time to Shakespeare’s, in a moral which is reliant not only upon

Christianity, but on the inferiority of human life and love, to a mode of catharsis which depends upon those very ideals. By examining the relative ends of the lovers involved, the nature of their love, and, ultimately, the role of fate and fortune, it is possible to argue that Shakespeare's work deviates so directly from Chaucer's that we can even view his work as reactionary as well as indicative of the changing perspectives of their relative times. Far from the Christian moral and message of human inferiority to the divine which Chaucer uses to root his tragedy and offer catharsis, Shakespeare chooses to base his moral in an emphasis upon the beauty and resilience of human life which depends upon romantic love, indicating that, in Shakespeare's time, the very conception of life has changed such that it now requires romantic love.

It is overtly tempting to read *Romeo and Juliet* as a religious play: the emphasis upon life and death, biblical references and the enormous influence of Friar Lawrence all play into the play's sententious mood. Such a reading is supported by the play's origins, a category of myth called the "Liebestod," in which "two young lovers face unsurmountable obstacles; they encounter the obstacles with defiance and secret plans, but their resistance fails because of accident or misjudgment; finally both die for love" (Levenson, 2000). Specifically, such a myth is defined by setting "the limits of desire at the highly charged point where lovers feel they have transcended ordinary human experience" (Levenson, 2000). It is entirely possible that a reading of Romeo's and Juliet's love as almost divine, "transcending ordinary human experience," may be supported by the history of the myth; Boccaccio's, Bandello's, and Da Porto's versions of the story were circulated at a time when there was increased unity between church and state (Levenson, 2000), and thus, a more cohesive audience. Therefore, such a portrayal may not be out of the ordinary. If we choose to pursue a reading of Romeo and Juliet's love as that which transcends ordinary human experience, their romance is almost Chaucerian. Their death, like the

betrayal of Criseyde, could be interpreted as punishment for human love that is so intense as to border on that of the divine. However, the definition of the Liebestod includes the point where “the lovers feel they have transcended...” specifically, the lovers themselves feel this way. While Chaucer’s narrator, and Troilus’s end both support the idea of Troilus’ love as actually transcending normal human experience, there is nothing in *Romeo and Juliet* to support their extraordinariness besides the lover’s own diction, which we are loath to take at face value. Shakespeare deviates once more from tradition, and in this case, makes a pointed statement about how his work should be perceived. Besides the definition of “Liebestod,” there is very little evidence, in this play at least, to argue definitively that Shakespeare wished to base his play upon ideas of the heavenly, divine, or even the afterlife, except, importantly, in order to provide context for his readers.

This is essential, for religion is not entirely absent from *Romeo and Juliet*, although the environment of socio-political censoring that pervaded Shakespeare’s lifetime makes it difficult to discern whether the author intended readers and play-goers to infer more from the slight inference in his words. Religious sentiment is especially notable in the scene where Romeo and Juliet first meet. Describing Juliet for the first time, Romeo says, “Beauty too rich for use, for Earth too dear” (I.iv.160). From the beginning, Juliet is idolized. So much so that Romeo is a “pilgrim” at “this holy shrine” (I.iv.207). It is easy to compare Romeo’s words to those of Chaucer’s Troilus invoking Criseyde as the virgin Mary, as he compares Juliet to an angel:

O speak again, bright angel, for thou art
As glorious to this night, being o’er my head,
As is a winged messenger of heaven
Unto the white upturned wound’ring eyes
Of mortals that fall back to gaze on him
When he bestrides the lazy puffing clouds
And sails upon the bosom of the air. (II.i.69-75).

Romeo distinguishes Juliet as angelic, separate from mortals. Specifically, he distinguishes between them, claiming to be mortal himself. Shakespeare critic Marianne Novy takes this point even further when she claims that Shakespeare portrays Juliet as a Christ figure, especially when she is presumed dead within her tomb (Novy, 1999). Yet, this presumes that Juliet is alone in her perfection and presumed divine nature. On the contrary, Juliet claims the same of Romeo, stating over and over again his “perfection” (II.i.89). She even goes so far as to call him “the god of my idoltry” (II.i.157). It can be argued that the lovers’ exceptionalism serves to enhance the possible religious allegory, but if this is true, it varies greatly from Chaucer’s. Where, in Shakespeare, all we have to base our perception of the lovers’ exceptionalism on is their own diction, Chaucer specifically rewards and punishes Troilus and Criseyde respectively. In contrast, Romeo’s and Juliet’s deaths are reiterated time and time again to be the result of fate or fortune. What is absent is Chaucer’s overwhelming Christian moral, a sense that human love is not exceptional when compared to the divine, and the treatment of the ignorant lovers accordingly. The audience of *Romeo and Juliet* does not come away thinking that Juliet is Christ, or sent from heaven. Instead, the play is rooted in the resolution of the family’s feud and the power of the love that resolved it. Yet, this is not to ignore the power of the religious allusions within the play. The additions to the classic story serve to root the audience, to convince a highly religious community as to the extent of Romeo’s and Juliet’s love. As Cooper noted in regards to Chaucer’s work, “Satire itself requires a common belief system, a set of values shared between author and reader, if it is to work at all; and for Chaucer, that system is a Christian one” (Cooper, 2010). Chaucer plays to a framework of a conventional love story, allowing his specific adaptations, in contrast, to become even more striking. Shakespeare, through well noted Christian references, plays to a common religious knowledge that provides both context and commonality for his audience.

Shakespeare continues to emphasize the power of life by connecting the notions of life and love. To the young couple, life and love go hand in hand. This is relayed noticeably in a dream which Romeo recounts, shortly before receiving news of Juliet's "death":

Methought I was this night already dead—
Strange dreams that give a dead man leave to think—
And that my lady Juliet came to me,
And breathed such life with kisses in my lips
That I was revived and was an emperor. (V.i. 67-72)

The dramatic irony the audience feels, knowing that Juliet is at this point considered "dead," as well as that the play must end with the death of the two lovers (as relayed by the prologue), only adds to the importance of how Shakespeare approaches the play's well-known resolution. The notion of resurrection, as well as the allusion to Book 3 of Chaucer's work, wherein Criseyde restores the swooning Troilus so that they can consummate their love, are both distinctly Chaucerian. However, where Chaucer utilizes religious allusion to further his Christian moral, Romeo's words have a slightly different effect. The foreshadowing which Shakespeare employs also eases the audience's understanding of the lovers' dramatic actions. As Romeo explains that Juliet literally brought him back to life simply with her love, he once again irrevocably ties the notions of love and life. What's more, he sweetens the idea of life, enriching it, as he becomes an "emperor" once he is revived. Which is not to say that life itself is the only thing which Romeo values, it is Juliet, i.e. life and love in combination, which makes it worth living. He tells the newly dead Paris, almost sadly, "thou hast prized thy love above thy life" (V.i.24). Yet, the idea of prizing one above the other is not possible for Romeo, for whom the two ideas are in a sense one and the same. This is echoed throughout the play as Friar Lawrence warns the young couple that they must continue to live in order not to deprive the other of their beloved, as if love is the point of life. If Romeo had valued his life above his love, he would have fled to Mantua and

never returned. It is possible to argue that in killing himself rather than live without Juliet (Snyder, 1970), Romeo is choosing love over life, but the absence of any notion of their “togetherness” in death casts doubt on this theory. More likely, Romeo is simply unable to bear life without his love, indicating both the strength of their love as well as the way he views life. This is echoed in his early words regarding Rosalind, when Romeo relays to Benvolio, “She hath forsworn to love, and in that vow / Do I live dead that live to tell it now” (I.i.214-215). When his love for Rosalind is not returned, Romeo claims to feel dead even as he lives. The fact that he carries out this warning after Juliet, his true love, appears dead, only confirms the undeniable connection of love and life within the play. Yet, this contrasts further with Chaucer, whose narrator claims that such love (ie, love other than divine love) is merely “feigned love.” It is possible to argue that it makes no sense for Troilus to kill himself for the fickle, human Criseyde, whose feigned love only existed in life anyway. For the two authors, the notions of the importance of life, and forms of love, differ vastly between the poem and the play.

Despite the similarities between the scenes, they differ once more in their result: Romeo and Juliet die, resulting in the reunion of their relative families, and Troilus and Criseyde both survive so that Criseyde may go on to betray Troilus. Romeo’s and Juliet’s deaths allow them to be preserved in their perfection. Romeo himself is comparable to Troilus, who loved so fiercely that he was rewarded a glimpse of eternity. Romeo tells Paris, “I love thee better than I love myself, for I come hither armed against myself” (V.iii.72). He puts himself second to his love for Juliet, even second to the life of an enemy. His character is a far cry from the selfish Troilus of Shakespeare’s imagining, but is similar to Chaucer’s. They are similar enough that one believes it entirely possible that Troilus would have proceeded to kill himself if Criseyde had not awoke, an action that would have further paralleled the two heroes. Yet, there is a difference between the

pairs of lovers, a difference that is found almost entirely in their respective heroines, Criseyde and Juliet. Thompson argues that the crucial turning point in the suicide scene allows this difference to play out.

The near suicide of Troilus on thinking Criseyde has died of grief (iv. 1156 ff.) is closely paralleled in Romeo's death, but the ending of Romeo and Juliet adds a dimension to the love-and-death theme which is not possible in Troilus and Criseyde in so far as it presents death as not only an escape from earthly difficulties but also a positive fulfillment and continuation of love. The reason for Criseyde's failure was that she 'forsoke him er that she deide' (i.56), the choice of words implying that she should have chosen to die first. The drive towards death is in fact a consequence of the mutability Criseyde's action illustrates: only in death can love become stable and invulnerable..." (Thompson, 1978)

Chaucer's narrator infers that Criseyde's death would have preserved the couple as young and in love; death would have preserved their perfection as it did Romeo and Juliet. Criseyde's similarity to Juliet is in many ways undeniable: both are portrayed from the beginning as beautiful, eligible, and kind, yet Chaucer's allusions to the virgin Mary lead his readers to almost idolize his heroine. Thus, it is important to question why Chaucer makes the decision both to include this scene as well as to continue the poem in the direction he does. Chaucer critic Lisa Kiser questions Chaucer's intent when including this scene.

In many ways, the death of Criseyde would better satisfy audience expectations for courtly literature than her ongoing and eventually traitorous life does, as she herself seems to know when, earlier in the book (IV.1771-77), she contemplated suicide by starvation. This false-death scene invokes Ovid's version of the story of Pyramus and Thisbe as an alternative narrative, as well as the double-death model of Tristan and Isolde; clearly it is one that would leave Criseyde's reputation as a courtly lover intact. But if Chaucer's narrator really does mean to defend, and even rescue, Criseyde from the accusations of generations of readers, as he so often claims, then why does he bring this scene to the fore? (Kiser, 2006)

Rooted in medieval literature and classic myth, Criseyde's death is expected on all fronts. Yet, Chaucer famously deviates from his classification as medieval through his use of satire and even greater morals. His version of the classic story of *Troilus and Criseyde* is characterized by his

final book, so much so that critics wonder whether it fits cohesively with the rest of his work. Yet this all important book, without which Troilus would not be redeemed and we would never understand Criseyde's role, would not be possible if Criseyde had died for Troilus. Her death would prevent her from betraying Troilus and teaching him how fickle "feigned," human love can be. Such a moral begs the question of *Romeo and Juliet*: what would have happened if the couple had lived? We'll never know, for Shakespeare chose to preserve their love in death. It is important that Shakespeare's ending be seen as purposeful, for the decision to prove the strength of his heroes' love and what it accomplishes, rather than let it chip away with time, speaks to the value Shakespeare affords to life and love which is noticeably absent in Chaucer.

Notions of fate and fortune define the actions of Romeo and Troilus so as to distinctly characterize them as Christian and pagan respectively, although neither author concedes so outright. Thompson discusses the role of fate in *Romeo and Juliet*: "It has often been remarked that *Romeo and Juliet* is untypical of Shakespearian tragedy on the general grounds that it does not set up strong casual relationships between the nature of its central characters and the nature of the events which befall them. In other words, it has been seen as a tragedy of external fate (or sheer bad luck) rather than a tragedy of character..." (Thompson, 1978). It is difficult to ignore Shakespeare's references to the "star crossed lovers" and the "inauspicious stars" which direct the lovers' fate. Arguments aside concerning the "untypical" nature of Shakespeare's approach, it does allow us to compare it to *Troilus and Criseyde*, for, as Thompson notes, "Tragedy of fate is not necessarily inferior, but simply a different kind of tragedy, and one which the Elizabethans had inherited from the middle ages" (Thompson, 1978) Chaucer makes numerous references to fate and fortune throughout his play, engaging with Boethian ideas about free will. Yet, there is a crucial moment, which I discuss in Chapter 1, where Troilus must decide whether to run away

with Criseyde and he ultimately chooses to let her leave due to a belief that to do so was fate. This decision essentially disregards the Boethian and Christian idea of free will, wherein human beings are entitled to free will even as God is omnipresent and all knowing. Troilus, in his paganism, is ignorant of this. The importance of this scene is not, as one could believe, that he lets Criseyde go, but that he does not understand Christian ideals; Chaucer's point is not tied to life or love at all, but to a divine understanding, Romeo, however, is entirely aware of his fate, and accordingly of his free will, for he does everything he can not to succumb to it. Yet, where Romeo's use of apostrophe, coupled with his understanding of free will, would make him, in Chaucer's world, an object to punish or reward respectively, Shakespeare has no wish to do so. We see a reference to Chaucer's world, as well as the beginnings of a deviation; for Shakespeare, life and love are so intertwined that one could not possibly offer a purely religious moral.

We see the different emphasis the authors place on the importance of fate in their use of metaphor: Chaucer and Shakespeare utilize the same imagery of love as a dangerous voyage, consistent with the motif of the tempest tossed ship at sea. As Joseph A. Longo notes, "in Chaucer, consistent with medieval philosophical assumptions, the boat image is often allied with that of Fortune, and man is depicted as helpless" (Longo, 1977). Both of Chaucer's lovers use such imagery in addressing each other as well as the state of love itself: "Towards my deth, in winde I sterve and saile" (V.614). McInnis describes what unites these passages: "Common to all these passages is the tension between steering and being buffeted by the tempest, of free will versus determinism; the vulnerability of the emotionally invested lover to the perils of fate" (McInnis, 2009). Troilus, consistent with his later decisions based on his interpretation of his fate, uses metaphors to establish how little power he has, and allows life to act upon him accordingly. Romeo also succumbs to metaphors indicating his passivity, using the sea-strewn

man to illustrate the power of love and fate at different times. He claims, “he hath the steerage of my course / Direct my suit” (I.iv.113), indicating how powerless he feels in his actions. He calls out, “Come, bitter conduct, come, unsavoury guide, / Thou desperate pilot, now at once run on / The dashing rocks thy seasick weary bark” (5.3.116-118). Notably, these lines come at critical moments in Romeo’s life: when he first meets Juliet, and before his suicide. In such an instance, he calls on fortune to finally play out. In these images, Romeo indicates that he feels acted upon, reiterating passivity. Romeo fully acknowledges fate, so much so that critics argue he disregards free will entirely.

McInnis chooses to argue not only that Romeo believes himself to be at the hands of fate, but that he is powerless and has no free will. However, such an argument would require Romeo to actually make decisions based on this belief, as Troilus does when he lets Criseyde be traded to the Greek camp. However, while Romeo’s words indicate a feeling of powerlessness, they are never offered as reasoning for the decisions he makes. In many instances, the external force he references is not actually fortune or fate, but love itself. Furthermore, Romeo and Juliet do everything in their power to stay together, despite their “star-crossed” destinies. Romeo even stirringly declares, “Then I deny you stars!” (V.i.24). The difference between the two lovers, Troilus and Romeo, is the Christian notion of free will. Although they both acknowledge fate, using it to amplify the intensity of their dramatic predicaments, Troilus lets fate dictate his actions while Romeo attempts to live with free will. In short, Romeo does not allow the idea that something must happen to diminish his free will to pursue Juliet. He does, in effect, what Troilus cannot. This is not to say that one of the two heroes is more or less strong, or admirable, than the other, but that their authors utilize them in different ways. Chaucer uses his hero’s inherent paganism to reinforce his ultimate moral and Christian revelation. Troilus’ legacy is of a well-

intentioned, passionate lover who was ultimately ignorant, and is punished accordingly. Yet, Shakespeare has no wish to enforce a Christian moral, even though his hero masters the idea of free will. Romeo's free will serves to indicate the true power of the love which he would even defy fate for, implying that Shakespeare wished to deviate from the entirely divine-centered moral of his predecessor.

Although it is tempting to describe *Romeo and Juliet* as a modern take on Chaucer's epic work, the play boasts more elements which distinguish it from *Troilus and Criseyde* than ones which connect the two. Despite scenes which draw comparison, Shakespeare's play reads more as a reaction to the well-known medieval piece, a reaction wherein he presents his own ultimate moral, one that differs greatly from Chaucer's. Although Shakespeare includes numerous religious allusions, the overwhelming message of his play is the connectedness of human life and love, not only in the young lover's inability to live without the other, but the author's choice to ground his play in the resolution of the Capulet's and Montague's feud, overall commenting upon the power of human love. Even the way in which Troilus and Romeo approach fate indicates a further deviation from the tradition of offering catharsis through a Christian moral, as Romeo's ability to acknowledge both fate and free will has little to do with divine judgment and much to do with the power of his love. However, it is undeniable that these religious ideas are still very much present. Whether their inclusion is meant to provide further context for an overwhelmingly Christian audience, to modernize the tale for Elizabethan England, or to indicate Shakespeare's own personal beliefs, possibly censored in the midst of tumultuous socio-political times, remains a complex and unanswered question. However, acknowledgment of the presence of these allusions allows for further critical analysis of Shakespeare's works, notably *Troilus and Cressida*.

4. *Romeo and Juliet* to *Troilus and Cressida*:

A discussion of how ideals of love and life shift within Shakespeare's own work.

Troilus and Cressida may appear to critical readers as a “problem play,” and whether it has actually been performed lends itself to questions of the play’s success. However, the story of love and conflict, so tragic in its portrayal of failed love and the pointlessness of war, yet comedic in the personification of its characters, deftly weaves aspects of multiple genres. The “overflowing,” and thus “problematic” nature of *Cressida* implies that the playwright’s meaning is too multifaceted to be conveyed by a single genre. In a way, the same can be said for *Romeo and Juliet*.

Legend, it had been heretofore taken for granted, was the proper matter for serious drama; romance was the stuff of the comic stage. Romantic tragedy—‘*an excelled conceited Tragedie of Romeo and Juliet*’ to cite to title page of the First Quarto— was one of those contradictions in terms which Shakespeare seems to have delighted in resolving. His innovation might be described as transcending the usages of romantic comedy, which are therefore very much in evidence, particularly at the beginning...it provides means to emphasize the complex bonds between art and social life intrinsic to the dramatic content. (Levenson, 2000)

Shakespeare was not opposed to adapting style and genre to convey his point, specifically when it comes to elevating romantic material to the forefront. These plays share a common element of displaying Shakespeare’s innovation, not only in regards to form, but in using new techniques to convey complex meanings. Yet, the same importance which Shakespeare attributes to love and life in *Romeo and Juliet* is notably absent in *Troilus and Cressida*. His willingness to deviate from tradition also indicates a possible willingness to depart from his own themes and tropes indicating a shift in the value system systems which Shakespeare chooses to perpetuate. By comparing the *Troilus and Cressida* to *Romeo and Juliet* in terms of the way they value the connection between love and life, it is possible to analyze the lovers and their relative fates in

order to understand the role of love in Elizabethan England, how it changes, and how Shakespeare may react to it at different times.

Although scholars do not agree as to when *Troilus and Cressida* first came to the public eye, there is a general consensus that Shakespeare wrote the play several years after *Romeo and Juliet*. David McInnis, in his 2008 criticism of Shakespeare's tragedies, notes that the textual precedent which *Romeo and Juliet* sets for *Troilus and Cressida* has not been afforded the scholarly notice it deserves. He goes on to argue the possible connection between the two:

It is a priori possible that Shakespeare's transformation of Chaucer's tender romance into a play that is unremittingly cynical (*Troilus and Cressida*) might have been guided by Shakespeare's consciousness of having already stressed the importance of love in his own earlier work (*Romeo and Juliet*). (McInnis, 2008).

McInnis' argument is intuitive: he acknowledges the correlation between Shakespeare and Chaucer's work, and even explores the "transformation" between the two. However, when he begins to discuss the causation between Shakespeare's two plays, McInnis points to a possible unwillingness to repeat material. McInnis' hypothesis as to Shakespeare's desire to explore other themes than "the importance of love" fails to recognize that *Troilus and Cressida*'s overarching themes, namely the futility of life and love, reflect more than simply a desire to address fresh material, they directly contrast with those of *Romeo and Juliet*. It is possible to argue that the shift in Shakespeare's writing is not a newfound interest in other themes, but an adaption, and perhaps reaction to, the themes already found in his work. Whereas *Romeo and Juliet* explores the power of romance and its place in human life, as well as its cathartic power, *Troilus and Cressida* utilizes romance to reveal the corrupt nature of the human world and ultimately refutes the ideals postulated in *Romeo and Juliet*.

A particular parallel between the two plays which critics point to time and time again is the aubade scene. Although the scene occurs in both *Romeo and Juliet* and *Troilus and Cressida*,

appearing to tie the two, critics are quick to point out just how common the aubade was to medieval literature. Thus, using the scene to support theories of direct relation is not entirely feasible (Thompson, 1978). However, the argument for the similarities (and pointed differences) between the two scenes is less about the form of the aubade and more about how the pressure of such a revealing moment, where love and dedication are revealed and tested, allows us to compare the way the lovers relate to each other and, consequentially, what the aubade reveals about their character.

An interpretation of the scene is to establish the subtle differences between the relative steadfastness of Troilus and Romeo. However, it is also an example of the difference between reality, in *Troilus and Cressida*, and naivety, in *Romeo and Juliet*. In both plays, the scene indicates an escape from reality: Troilus and Cressida enjoy love while the war rages around them, and Romeo's and Juliet's marriage bed is book-ended by Tybalt's death and Romeo's banishment. Robert Uphaus argues that the presence of violence and death defines Romeo and Juliet's love scene:

Juliet is trying to hold back Death. It's not just as we have noted, that "die" also means "have an orgasm" and that Romeo means it in both senses when he says "I must be gone and live, or stay and die." He means it only in the primary sense when he says "Come death, and welcome. Juliet wills it so." Neither has he quite forgotten that he is under sentence of death if he's found in Verona, let alone in Juliet's bedroom, and that is why Juliet shifts gears so suddenly; the lark with its "harsh discords and unpleasing sharps" brings her back to reality; it "divideth us," with a nice play on the musical sense of "division." And so the bird of morning becomes the bird of mourning. (Uphaus, 2014)

The lovers cannot escape death even as they consummate their love. Yet, although they are young and willing to forget, at least for a moment, the threat of death, their naivety only enhances the appreciation for love that we see in the lovers. The important distinction between this scene and Troilus' is that Romeo takes care to express his love to Juliet, to the point where the audience almost believes that he will stay and risk death, that he loves her more than life

itself (Chapter 3). Still, when Romeo finally does leave, we see that the lovers have chosen to let rationality rule their love for the moment. Their love, although naïve, is still rational. Their romance is not, truthfully, all that naïve, for this moment does not cause their death. Rather, it is a powerful enough declaration as to make the audience fiercely believe in the couple's love for each other, something that Troilus and Cressida never wished to do.

However, when we consider the scene in light of *Troilus and Cressida*, as well as in the context of “courtly love,” the lovers do appear naïve. Larry Benson, in his criticism, “Courtly Love and Chivalry in the Later Middle Ages,” defines courtly love as a depiction wherein the male lover is “so extravagantly humble that he will obey his lady in everything, so courteous he would rather die than offend her even in thought, and so religiously devoted to her that he prays for but one drop of grace, without which he can have neither bliss nor hope” (Benson, 1995). We see, in Benson's definition, numerous instances where life and death are tied in the definition of love. Romeo and Juliet also cannot escape the connection between life, death, and love, even beyond the early modern connotation of death and orgasm. Still, their courtly love remains intact even when Romeo leaves; they are still in the “courting” stage of their relationship, as circumstances prevent them from fully being together. Cressida, on their other hand, is unable to maintain the naivety of courtly love when Troilus leaves her. She bemoans, “you men will never tarry” (IV.ii.18), seeming to have realized that, unlike in courtly love, her lover will not “obey his lady in everything.” When Juliet and Cressida both beg their lover to return to them, only Romeo acquiesces. If we consider *Troilus and Cressida* as Shakespeare's more mature and developed response to his own work, it is possible to consider *Romeo and Juliet* as an example of naïve, courtly love, which is then refuted in his later work.

By further considering the literary conventions of courtly love which Shakespeare alludes to, it is possible to distinguish the pairs of lovers based on their maturity in love and life. *Troilus and Cressida*, for all intents and purposes, should be the perfect example of a “courtly love epic.” D. W. Robertson, in his criticism, “The Concept of Courtly Love as an Impediment to the Understanding of Medieval Texts,” argues that Cressida’s position as a widow makes her the “ideal” subject of courtly love, for she is not so chaste as to avoid all contact, yet is still free to wed (Robertson, 1968). However, while this relationship may be ideal for the male suitor, it fails to recognize any complex feelings on behalf of the widow herself. Cressida brings to her relationship with Troilus an entire wealth of knowledge of men and love. Their relationship, at least on her part, is far from naïve. This is evident when she proclaims, “Yet hold I off. Women are angels, wooing: Things won are done, joys soul lies in the doing. That she belov’d knows nought that knows not this: Men prize the thing ungain’d more than it is” (I.ii.311-316). As she speaks from experience, Cressida justifies her action with a larger universal truth. Far from being caught up in her own world, Cressida uses her own experiences and observations to come to a conclusion about Troilus. She is mature, wise, and, sadly, jaded in regards to love.

Although some critics choose to read Cressida’s maturity as a sign of sexual deviance, Thompson points to this maturity as the next, more realistic stage, of courtly love. She argues, “Both Criseyde and Juliet come off rather well in a comparison with their lovers. In both worlds there is a striking point at which we realize that the man is still ensnared in the rhetorical flummery of ‘courtly love’ while the woman has passed declaration of affection” (Thompson, 1978). Thompson is correct to point out Juliet’s maturity, although the young lover has not reached the same point as Cressida. Juliet is still, in many ways, stuck in the realm of courtly love. This is apparent in the manner in which the couples discuss love and life. Their words of

affirmation reveal the type of love each couple embodies. Juliet, for example, speaks to Romeo in a manner that indicates self-absorption: “If thou thinkest I am too quickly won, / I’ll frown, and be perverse, and say thee nay, / So thou wilt woo; but else, not for the world” (II.ii. 95-97). Although her lines are a mere passing remark, Juliet speaks in terms of “I” and “thee”; she is fully concerned with her and Romeo’s romance and little else. Although seemingly harmless, when compared with *Troilus and Cressida*, the young couple seems that much more young. After Cressida challenges Troilus, “But you are wise, / or else you love not” (III.ii.147-48), he finally speaks at length in an oddly qualified and impersonal declaration that suggests both the idealized faith he would require and his doubts about any woman:

O! that I thought it could be in a woman—
As, if it can, I will presume in you—
To feed for aye her lamp and flames of love;
To keep her constancy in plight and youth,
Outliving beauty's outward, with a mind
That doth renew swifter than blood decays... (III.ii.153-158)

Troilus, like Juliet, speaks in terms of “I” and “you,” but he relates his sentiments back to a greater understanding of women and constancy in love. He speaks from experience; his view is not solely limited to the romantic experience in which he currently finds himself. While Romeo and Juliet discuss love in terms of each other and their reactions to one another, Troilus and Cressida discuss love in general terms about “men” and “women”; their words have depth and experience. This is not to say that they are so mature as to act in an ideal manner; in many circumstances, the couple treats each other poorly and eventually their love falls apart. Yet, considering Cressida as mature enough to make rational decisions assists us when we consider her actions and how we may perceive them. Shakespeare asks, in *Troilus and Cressida*, how love plays out in this more experienced, non-idealized world, distinctly aware of the literary bonds of

courtly love which fail to hold true when we depart from medieval literature or even literature itself.

As violence abounds in both plays, from the deaths of Tybalt and Mercutio to the entirety of the Trojan war, it is necessary to consider how violence, and accordingly historic gender roles, play a role in the play's action. Romeo, for example, is a perfect example of a male dominated by an urge to fight, which ultimately is his undoing. The death of Tybalt at his hands ends in his banishment, and eventually his death. Even his language regarding love is marked by violence, as he describes Rosalind:

She'll not be hit
With Cupid's arrows, she hath Dian's wit;
And in strong proof of chastity well armed,
From love's weak childish bow she lives uncharted.
She will not stay the siege of loving terms,
Nor bide th' encounter of assailing eyes. (I.i. 199-204).

As Romeo describes his love interest, he portrays love as something violent and assailing, something that one needs to be "well armed" against. Rosalind is idolized for her ability to escape the "siege of loving terms." If her resistance to love is her strength, we must ask how we are to perceive of the contrast in Juliet's willingness to give in to Romeo's love. Juliet, as the object of Romeo's affection, ultimately fulfills her gender role by acquiescing to his courtship. Both Romeo and Juliet fulfill their gender roles up until the very last act, wherein everything changes. Romeo refuses to fight Paris in the tomb, telling him, "I beseech thee, youth, / Put not another sin upon my head / By urging me to fury" (V.iii. 69-71). Romeo appears to reach a level of maturity and recognize the consequences of his actions. His masculine desire to prove himself through violence has been made secondary as the thought of losing his love consumes him.

Such a reversal of character is mirrored by the manner in which Romeo kills himself. Poison is generally regarded as a female weapon: “poison causes greater anxiety than other violence, because it allows those with lesser physical strength, wits, political power, or other means to prevail over those with greater power, and is therefore potentially a force against tradition, order, and hierarchy” (Kaye, 2012). Furthermore, poison is used by women many times throughout Shakespeare’s plays, but is only used by a man in *Hamlet*. The use of poison, regarded as a woman’s weapon, suggests that Romeo has given up classic male violence in the face of death. Juliet too reverses gender roles through her use of the dagger, a male symbol. Dara Kaye argues that “by using a masculine weapon, Juliet demonstrates courage and virtue” (Kaye, 2012). The lover’s reversal of gender roles serve to emphasize the power of love upon their character as well as a new mutuality: in an idealized ending, one lover no longer has more power over the other. However, the young lovers appear entirely unaware of the implications of their actions.

In contrast, Troilus and Cressida worry endlessly as to the roles they both wish to fulfill and feel that they are supposed to fulfill. Furthermore, as Marianne Novy notes, both plays are set in a society where women are commonly associated with weakness, but “while in the earlier play, lines from the servants and the Friar establish most of this atmosphere, here more of it comes from the words of Troilus himself” (Novy, 1999). Troilus, our supposed hero, both creates such an atmosphere with his words and dictates its continuation with his actions. He implies that because of his love for Cressida, he is “weaker than a woman’s tear” (1.i.9). When Aeneas asks why he is not in battle, he says “Because not there. This woman’s answer sorts, / For womanish it is to be from thence” (1.i.1023). Novy argues that Troilus’ words are not an isolated incident but a viewpoint that crafts the entire play:

The lines reveal not only self-criticism but condescension toward women; this is especially obvious because in the scene where these lines occur, so much of the dialogue is about Cressida. When Troilus moves from his description of her as a pearl to his snappy comeback to Aeneas, we see his ambivalence toward women—his share in the cultural ambivalence that both glorifies and subordinates Helen. (Novy, 1999)

Novy notes that Troilus' words are not just his own but part of a larger culture, just like *Romeo and Juliet*. However, where Romeo never acknowledges his part in supporting given gender roles, Troilus worries about them constantly and eventually gives into them, when he tells Hector: "Brother, you have a vice of mercy in you, / Which better fits a lion than a man...Let's leave the hermit pity with our mother" (V.iii.3738-45). Cressida, on the other hand, does subvert gender roles. She says that in her love for Troilus she "wished myself a man / Or that we women had men's privilege / Of speaking first (III.ii.12022). Yet, it is she, in the scene where they meet, who first invites him to the bedchamber and first declares her love. When we compare such an outright discussion of gender roles to *Romeo and Juliet*, it is clear that *Troilus and Cressida* is an advancement of ideas already postulated in the earlier work. Shakespeare's rejection of gender roles, albeit only in *Romeo and Juliet's* final scene, suggests an acknowledgement of a gender-based value system. Thus, when *Troilus and Cressida* takes on gender so readily, it appears as a maturation on the part of the author, a realization of what his work addresses and a desire to face it head on. Romeo and Juliet merely exist in this world, while Troilus and Cressida both fight and, eventually, give in to it. Shakespeare's initial attempt to address classic gender roles suggests an idealized system where love is mutual. Yet, Troilus and Cressida's conscious rejection of gender roles, which nonetheless fails to resolve their love or its greater conflicts, relates to the plays lack of a value system altogether: where love and honor are only golden armor, rotten on the inside.

The differing levels of value which the lovers in *Romeo and Juliet* and *Troilus and Cressida* bestow upon their beloveds reveals more about how Shakespeare chooses to portray their relative societies in his literature. It is unsurprising, to contemporary readers, that women portrayed in medieval literature may be described based on their value as wives or mothers. Juliet and Cressida share a powerlessness in the face of the value which the men in their lives afford to them. Marianne Novy explains how value defines Shakespeare's later play:

In *Troilus and Cressida* the lovers' world has all too much in common with the larger world of their society. Shakespeare juxtaposes the titular love affair to the analogous story of the Trojan War, in which Helen, though ostensibly glorified as 'the face that launched a thousand ships,' is actually reduced to a pawn in a male competition. The combination is one of the most devastating pictures in the Shakespeare cannon or anywhere else of the genre relations consequent on the treatment of women primarily as property" (Novy, 1999)

The scale of the decisions made in terms of Cressida's trade, and Troilus' wavering devotion to her, seem that much more dramatic when placed in the context of the Trojan War. This is not a comparison which Shakespeare shies away from, choosing instead to have Troilus and the soldiers fiercely debate Helen's, and accordingly Cressida's, value and what honor it affords them. It is easy, in this scenario, to claim that Cressida is but a pawn of men's need and desire.

However, Shakespeare's depiction of value extends to *Romeo and Juliet* as well. Juliet is introduced to the audience through her father's description of her eligibility to wed:

But saying o'er what I have said before.
My child is yet a stranger in the world.
She hath not seen the change of fourteen years.
Let two more summers wither in their pride
Ere we may think her ripe to be a bride. (1.ii. 7-11).

Juliet is not even given a name, but is instead defined by her relationship to her father, "my child." She is categorized as innocent, a "stranger in the world," in need of protection by a husband. Although her father claims that she is not yet ready to wed, her questionable readiness

is not defined by intelligence or maturity, but “ripeness,” a hypersexualized quality. Juliet’s first introduction to the audience is of the utmost importance as it creates a lens through which we will view her for the rest of the play: one that perceives her as a passive object of love, defined by her status in love and marriage and little else.

Furthermore, Juliet seems unaware of her own value, either in the eyes of men or in terms of her own independent life. She chooses to discuss and base her actions on the value of the love she and Romeo share. She claims, “They are but beggars that can count their worth; / But my true love is grown to such excess, / I cannot sum up sum of half my wealth” (II.vi. 32-34) Juliet, in prioritizing the value of their love, ignores her own value, and effectively dies because of it when the death of her lover results in her own suicide. Her fierce belief in the value of her love, with no respect to her own worth or independent desires, may explain how little conflict she undergoes in the choice to join her lover in death. She grieves, “Yea, noise? Then I’ll be brief. O happy dagger, / This is thy sheath. There rust and let me die” (V.iii.182-183). Her decision to kill herself comes just three lines after her recognition that Romeo is dead. What little she does say does not reveal much about her decision, thus we must interpret what Shakespeare purposefully does not include. The audience does not perceive any hesitation on Juliet’s part, nor an internal battle between life and death. Instead, her decision seems natural, as if her mind was made up long ago. In a way, it was, as their relationship has always been defined by its interconnectedness with life (and accordingly death), as well as Juliet’s refusal to afford value to anything but the love she and Romeo share. Shakespeare’s commentary upon the transfer of value from marriage to love is effective in her choice of death with her lover rather than betrothal to Paris, yet the lovers seem unaware of the choices they are making.

In contrast, Cressida is all too aware of how she is perceived by the men who dictate her life. As she is traded to the Greeks for the unclear purposes of a man's war, which itself was based on the value of a woman (Helen), she must use the very objectification which defines her womanhood in order to survive. When she chooses to accept Diomedes's advances in order to secure her position within the Greek camp, Cressida soliloquizes:

Troilus, farewell! one eye yet looks on thee
But with my heart the other eye doth see.
Ah, poor our sex! this fault in us I find,
The error of our eye directs our mind:
What error leads must err; O, then conclude
Minds sway'd by eyes are full of turpitude. (V.ii.153-159).

At first glance, it appears that Cressida is blaming her feminine weakness for her fickle heart when she bemoans, "Ah, poor our sex!" However, she is merely repeating the objectification which has been thrust upon her, and all women, throughout the play. As the eye of Troilus, and every man who is influenced by his words, perceives the beauty as the pearl, both beautiful and valuable, it is indeed Cressida's "poor sex" which suffers. Cressida, a pawn of men, is in fact incredibly wise to preserve her value and fight to maintain it by staying alive in the chaos of the war. If, indeed, she is serious as to regret her "weak" sex, it is entirely the fault of the men who have reinforced this view through the play. Cressida, the wise widow, is incredibly aware of how she is treated by the men in her life. She is an aware pawn, but a pawn nonetheless. By the play's conclusion, the audience has seen two sacrifices: Juliet sacrifices life for love, and Cressida sacrifices her love for her life. There is a shift, in Shakespeare's writing, away from believing in the power of love.

The pessimistic nature of that belief becomes evident when we consider the greater implication of such an emphasis upon value: one which *Troilus and Cressida* takes much further than *Romeo and Juliet*. This is apparent when we consider Romeo's romantic words in

comparison to Troilus'. Despite Juliet's words as to the value of their love, Romeo's speeches consistently speak to Juliet's value. This occurs in the balcony scene, in a speech delivered by Romeo to Juliet:

I am no pilot, yet wert thou as far
As that vast shore washed with the farthest sea,
I should adventure for such merchandise.
(II.i.125-27)

Romeo refers to his love as "merchandise." Although his words are a metaphor, and not an exact description, the meaning is quite clear that he both desires to possess her and gain what he can from her value. We see almost the exact same sentiment in Troilus' words:

What Cressid is, what Pandar, and what we:
Her bed is India, there she lies, a pearl;
Between our Ilium and where she resides
Let it be called the wild and wand'ring flood,
Ourself the merchant and this sailing Pandar
Our doubtful hope, our convoy and our bark.
(1.i.92-98)

Troilus and Romeo, united in their use of sailing metaphors, depicted as being powerless in the ocean, are nonetheless the characters with the most power over their romantic counterparts.

Troilus, like Romeo, does not fail to attribute value to his lover, referring to her as a "pearl."

However, what makes *Troilus and Cressida*'s metaphor all the more powerful is the way Shakespeare extends the metaphor throughout the play. Cressida is not the only pearl, for Helen is "a pearl / Whose price hath launched above a thousand ships" (2.2.81-81). The metaphor becomes universalized, and is made applicable to more than one pair of lovers. It is not even isolated to the concept of love itself, as the idea of Helen's worth dictates an entire war and the actions of an entire nation. The choice, as Troilus notes, to preserve Helen's value, and thus the soldier's honor, dictates their treatment of Cressida; the metaphor has cyclic implications. Yet while both metaphors appear to come from the same root of women's value, in comparison,

Romeo and Juliet does little to address it. While Romeo's use of the metaphor allows him to prove himself as a lover and idealizes their young love, the play fails to reach the broader implications of *Troilus and Cressida*. *Romeo and Juliet*'s greater context, the family feud, has little to do with the notion of value and is effectively resolved by the death of the lovers. Without the extended metaphor, the instance of objective "value" in *Romeo and Juliet* appears isolated, and insignificant. In comparison to *Troilus and Cressida*, it even appears outdated. In light of Shakespeare's later play, his earlier one appears almost naïve and unaware of the corrupt, unappealing world which created it. While the idea is present in *Romeo and Juliet*, it has not yet reached the level of pessimism which resounds within *Troilus and Cressida*.

The question then becomes, what can we make of the conflict ridden, war strewn context of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Troilus and Cressida*, and what does such a pessimistic setting reveal in terms of their larger historical context? Uphaus points to the importance of considering the larger motif of Shakespeare's romances: "The value accorded to individual human life is replaced by an emphasis on the cycle of life and death as a continuation of the larger processes of life itself. Human nature, so to speak, is supplanted by 'great, creating Nature,' and death is seen to be a prelude to the larger representative processes of the total life cycle of nature" (Uphaus, 2014). It is impossible to consider *Romeo and Juliet* without considering its larger context of the Montague and Capulet feud: without the resolution of said feud, the cathartic nature of the play would be almost entirely lost. Comparatively, *Troilus and Cressida*'s themes of decay and the fears regarding the realization of desire are entirely dependent upon the context of the Trojan War. Yet, *Troilus and Cressida* does not give in to the trope of death being tied to something greater by truthfully not addressing death very much at all. Hector's death takes precedence in the final scene, while Troilus' and Cressida's respective ends are essentially unknown. The two

lovers are swallowed, instead, by the war. Thus, conflict, whether familial or war-like, envelops the central romances of both plays, yet while the resolution of the families' feud validates Romeo and Juliet's value of love and life together, the continuation of the Trojan war diminishes any value of love or honor and leaves us with a depiction of a hollow, value-less society.

The importance of conflict helps us understand the larger setting of Shakespeare's England, and why this setting may have inspired the relative value systems perpetuated by the two lovers. Levenson reports: "Proclamations against fighting in public had been issued by Henry VII, Henry VIII, and Elizabeth I. Despite these and other measures, civil disorder erupted in town and countryside until the turn of the century. Dangerous feuds threatened the peace of whole counties" (Levenson, 2000). In this way, *Romeo and Juliet* illustrates the truth of the time. In the same way that the play's adaptation from poetry and Italian literature was suited to a contemporary English audience, it is natural that Shakespeare chose to incorporate contemporary conflict. Levenson notes, "the play depicts their crisis in contemporary terms, heightening correspondences in the fiction with analogies from Elizabethan life" (Levenson, 2000). The notion of "civil disorder" is notably illustrated in the Montague and Capulet feud, an element of the classic tale which is emphasized and made more complex in Shakespeare's version than any version before (Levenson, 2000). The importance of the feud cannot be understated: it surrounds the protagonists with an ideology which affects the way they think and act. Snyder goes so far as to argue that the context of civil disorder may be a larger metaphor for the way religion operated in England at this time, arguing that "the feud represents how ideology works: the beliefs, assumptions, and especially practices which reduce everyone and everything to sameness" (Snyder, 1970). The religious turmoil experienced during Shakespeare's time may help his resolution offer additional catharsis, giving an idealized ending to a multi-dimensional conflict.

Such a resolution gives Romeo's and Juliet's sacrifice meaning, validating their love and romance. This is not to say that *Romeo and Juliet* is entirely about religion, merely that in a time where socio-political lives were dominated by religion, any commentary upon those systems is inadvertently a commentary upon the religious systems and conflicts which abound, and ultimately irrevocably tie love and romance in the play.

It is thus important to consider what effect such a writing style may have had on *Troilus and Cressida*. Instead of contemporary England, Shakespeare chooses the setting of the Trojan war. Thompson notes how, arguably, these settings are not so different: "By setting the love against a background of hostility (the Greek/Trojan war, the Montague/Capulet feud) both works emphasize its fragility as well as its power. By allowing a greater, more generalized good to emerge at the end both achieve an effect of ultimate comfort after great grief and pathos" (Thompson, 1978). However, Thompson's argument that *Troilus and Cressida* is rooted in a "more generalized good" seems forced when we consider the deeply pessimistic ending of the play: neither the romance nor the war offers the audience any catharsis. However, this is not to say that the two plays don't share similarity in this aspect. Like *Romeo and Juliet*, the notions of romance and conflict in society are irrevocably tied. Robertson notes that "Troilus" in Latin, is suggestive of the English translation "little Troy." Thus, the downfall of Troilus, his descent in the war and abandonment of love, is analogous to the downfall of Troy itself. Famously, the myth that Brutus of Troy founded Britain led to a fascination among English society with the fallen city, making Shakespeare's portrayal of the idealized society all the more powerful. The way in which Shakespeare chooses to root his romances in the larger context of contemporary conflict illustrates a shift from the hopeful catharsis of *Romeo and Juliet* to the pessimistic

turmoil of Troilus and Cressida, and leads us to question whether Shakespeare does not feel similarly about the society for which he writes.

The transformation of the idealization of love, and the ultimate problematic nature of *Troilus and Cressida*, poses more questions than answers. However, David McInnis notes, that “If critics today remain confounded by this ‘problem play’, perhaps we can conclude that it is because Shakespeare was intentionally penning a radically experimental departure not only from literary tradition, as is commonly acknowledged, but also from his own previous work” (McInnis, 2009). We see this departure from Shakespeare’s own tradition in the differences between the Trojan tale and its predecessor in many ways, *Romeo and Juliet*. The literary device of courtly love, which CS Lewis refers to as “the religion” of love, (Lewis, 1936), reveals the relative maturity and awareness of each set of lovers, as Troilus and Cressida engage with its conventions, while Romeo and Juliet seem unaware of the confines to which they are subjected. This is most apparent in the character of Cressida, who uses the wisdom of her years and experiences to question her lover’s devotion, instead of letting herself be ruled by it. When she postulates, “Men prize the thing ungained more than it is” (I.ii.274), she puts forth a theory for both pieces of literature: perhaps we prize what we cannot have more than what we do. In terms of *Romeo and Juliet*, whose young and naïve love never lived to fulfillment, we treasure their courtly love and idealize it for the fact that it never lasted long enough to become tarnished. In terms of Troilus and Cressida’s love, which is tested time and time again, and eventually crumbles under the pressure of time and war, we see what happens to courtly love when it is faced with reality. Shakespeare abandons literary tradition to express a value system that goes beyond our definition of even early modern works. The value which Shakespeare affords to love and life is ultimately revealed to be naivete, as *Troilus and Cressida* diminishes the notion of

value altogether. In the end, even *Troilus and Cressida* acknowledges itself as a mere facade of “reality,” for as Troilus refuses to read Cressida’s letter, he echoes Hamlet, saying “Words, words, mere words, no matter from the heart” (V. iii. 199). Both plays are mere words, but *Romeo and Juliet* even more so. It is a belief in love, a romantic ideology which fades to the action of war, the overtaken Troy of *Troilus and Cressida*.

Conclusion:

When we trace the path of Chaucer's ideas, morals, and themes, they appear in Shakespeare's work in drastically modified forms. Purely examining *Troilus and Criseyde* in comparison to *Troilus and Cressida*, it is impossible to ignore the pessimism which links them. When we compare the authors' portrayal of Troilus, we see a similarly flawed man: capable of hyperbole and ultimately doomed. Yet, when Chaucer's Troilus is granted a glimpse of redemption, he also grants his readers hope: however fickle human love may be, there is always religious love. In contrast, Shakespeare's Troilus is all too human, a fact that is reflected by the war and the corrupt nature of the people around him. Although Chaucer's Troilus is lauded as an example of how divine love should be portrayed, he ultimately still pays the price for his paganism: suffering in both life and death. Similarly, Shakespeare's Troy offers little in the form of redemption, instead choosing to perpetuate the human, flawed nature of the society which Chaucer illustrates so beautifully. They each mirror the author's contemporary society, trapped in social, political, and religious turmoil. Yet, the hope which Chaucer offers, the sentient message of the importance of Christian awareness, is absent in Shakespeare.

However, hope can be found in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, notably in his method of catharsis. Just as it is possible to see a shift in perspective from Chaucer to Shakespeare in their depiction of Troilus and Cressid's love, it is possible that we can discern other shifts, specifically in modes of catharsis, from *Troilus and Criseyde* to *Romeo and Juliet*. Although both stories are ultimately tragic, their authors root them in some form of hope. Chaucer's Troilus, who is all too human, is offered just enough of a glimpse of redemption to understand how secondary his human life is. Yet, Romeo's and Juliet's deaths offer a redemption of their own in the resolution of the two families' feud. We see a shift in perspective, from Chaucer's

time to Shakespeare's, in a moral which is reliant not only upon Christianity, but on the inferiority of human life and love, to a mode of catharsis which depends upon those very ideals. Shakespeare's emphasis upon the beauty and resilience of human life indicates that in his time, the very concept of life has changed such that it now requires romantic love.

It is thus necessary to investigate what may have changed to create a shift within Shakespeare's own writing from a system which values life and love, to one which mocks those same values and reveals a society with hollow values. When we compare the sets of lovers, Romeo and Juliet appear in many ways younger and more naive than their older counterparts. In death, we can idealize the young lovers for the love that never lasted long enough to become tarnished. Troilus and Cressida's love expands upon their youthful experience: overcoming the aubade, and even separation, only to be torn apart in the face of a society and a war which are in no ways conducive or supportive of the idealization of life and love. The notion of value altogether appears hollow, as values of love and honor are revealed to perpetuate only disappointment. We must question, as Shakespeare's work shifts so dramatically in tone, whether the author has not come to feel similarly about the Elizabethan Society which so dramatically shapes his writing.

One of the most powerful aspects of Chaucer's and Shakespeare's work is that it speaks to its audiences across generations. Yet, although we can appreciate it regardless of context, an understanding of the relative circumstances of a work's creation can lend itself to even deeper analysis. D.W. Robertson notes that "the first step we should make in our understanding of the poem is a recognition of the fact that medieval poetry generally is functional in the society that produces it. It does not have a "reality of its own." Nor was Chaucer a detached historian of past events. The real subject of Troilus and Criseyde lies in the life around Chaucer and not in the

remote Trojan past. No one in the fourteenth century thought of art as existing "for its own sake." Art was, rather, a vehicle for cherished ideas designed to be practical in its effects" (Robertson, 1968).

Some argue that it is easy to dismiss Shakespeare as a relic of his time, and that we must disregard further attempts to liken his works to our everyday lives. However, a close reading of *Troilus and Cressida* reveals how very much Shakespeare both learned from and adapted Chaucer's work, directly reflecting the influences of his times. It's entirely possible that if Shakespeare would have written *Troilus and Cressida* today, we may have had an entirely new, feminist version of our classically "false" lady, and perhaps an ending to *Troilus and Cressida* with an entirely different type of pessimism. Where once, a reading of Chaucer's work may have inspired Shakespeare to ruminate on the power of human companionship, able to mend civic irresponsibility and create hope for generations of audiences, time changes the author's writing, allowing *Troilus and Cressida* to illustrate the inevitable fate of love and honor in a society which is so corrupt that its people cannot even recognize their own depravity. In the absence of Chaucer's devout morality, or even the religious allusions and ultimate humanity based mode of catharsis of *Romeo and Juliet*, we are left to ruminate not only upon the new modern society which inspires such a pessimistic authorship and the abandonment, at least in this work, of religious allusion altogether. Shakespeare's reading of Chaucer shifts so greatly throughout his works that he no longer finds hope, however, secular, in the great, classical romance, but only a reflection of the disappointment and corruption of the society around him, leaving no choice but to insinuate as much in his literature.

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